

**EXPERIENCED TEACHING ASSISTANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR WORK IN  
THE INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH 'SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS'  
IN ENGLISH MAINSTREAM SECONDARY SCHOOLS.**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores Teaching Assistants' perceptions and constructions of their work in the inclusion of pupils with 'special educational needs' (SEN) within mainstream secondary schools. In a field where much research has focussed on the technician (Teaching Assistant characteristics and deployment), exploration of 'inclusion' and of power is prioritised.

The study uses elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the words of Teaching Assistants (TAs) talking about their work. A simple CDA framework is produced based on the work of others and piloted with film footage (from the public domain) of TAs talking about their work. The framework is then used to analyse interview data from 8 TAs who have extensive experience and degree qualifications.

Areas of commonality for the TAs include prioritising of discretion, even imperceptibility, in class as they actively stay 'under the radar' of teachers and schools. A divide *within* the mainstream schools between 'the mainstream' and SEN resourced 'base' seems apparent to the TAs, whether the support base is geographically separated or not. 'Inclusion' is actively sought, for example through advocacy, alternative provision and energetic deployment of professional strategies.

Insights from the work of Foucault, Derrida and Goffman are deployed in the analysis of aspects of the TAs' perceptions in order to contribute theoretical imagination to consider *why* the limitations in TA practice (both within this study and within the wider literature) may occur. A degree of emotional labour is indicated but Goffman's work on managing spoiled identity, stigma and 'cooling' is of particular interest in offering possible explanations for the TAs' perceptions.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This study explores experienced Teaching Assistants' perceptions of their work in the inclusion of pupils with 'special educational needs' (SEN) in mainstream secondary schools in England. It seeks to listen to a small number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) and to reflect on their perceptions using critical discourse analysis (CDA) and elements of the theories of Foucault, Derrida and Goffman to help frame the analysis. This introductory chapter outlines the rationale, the research aim and questions and the methodological orientation of the study.

### **A. Rationale**

The rationale for the project lies in the national significance of the work of TAs, in questions raised by substantive research in this area, in the current status of inclusive education and in personal professional experience of work with TAs.

#### *National significance of the work of TAs*

Growth in the numbers of TAs is well-established with figures for full-time equivalent (FTE) TAs in publicly-funded schools in England since 1997 as follows (figure 1.1):

**Figure 1.1**

<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
60,600	65,560	69,700	79,050	95,020	105,440	121,270	132,240

<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Jan 2010</b>	<b>Nov 2010</b>	<b>Nov 2011</b>
147,250	153,510	163,800	176,990	183,700	194,230	213,900	219,800

Numbers of TAs (FTE) in England from House of Commons (2011) Hansard written answer 9.9.11 and DfE Statistical First Releases.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Hansard figures were checked against consecutive government statistical first releases including DfE (2012a). Figures vary slightly due to changes in recording and, possibly, deployment, but the steady increase in numbers is consistent across all records.

Similar growth has taken place in the United States with the position of 'para-educators' for individuals with disabilities enshrined in law (Shyman 2010, p. 828). The growth in numbers of TAs, who now represent around 25% of the school workforce in the UK (DfE 2012a), may be seen as 'one of the most profound changes in UK schools over the past 15 years' (Blatchford, Russell and Webster 2012, p.5), necessarily introducing a 'different kind of social and instructional dynamic' (p.6) over the traditional classroom arrangement of teacher plus pupils.

TAs also hold a central position in the field of special educational needs<sup>2</sup> (SEN) and are seen internationally as a 'primary tool' for inclusion (Hemmingsson, Borell and Gustavsson 2003, p.88). It is often assumed (as, for example, by Shakespeare 2006, p.32) that inclusive schooling automatically calls for 'paraprofessional' input. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), for example, note that in a study of three 'very culturally different' secondary schools, additional adult support was seen as a prerequisite for inclusion (p. 184), the same assumption being noted by Glazzard (2011) in a primary school. TA 'hours' have almost been perceived as 'currency' in which support is calculated (Roaf 2003, p.222) and schools have tended to see the number of pupils with SEN as a key reason for growth in TA numbers (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.56).

TA 'substitution' for teachers in the pedagogy of pupils with the SEN has also been increasingly noted (OfSTED 2004, p.17, Reindal 2008, p.136). Empirical studies such as that of Bedford, Jackson and Wilson (2008) found that in interviews / focus groups with around 41 teachers, TAs were often expected to have sole charge of some pupils with SEN (p.18). This phenomenon is also reported in the extensive review by Giangreco and Doyle (2007, p. 434) and in the largest study available in this field, the 5 year systematic 'Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project by the Institute of Education for the DCSF (Blatchford, Russell and Webster 2012). Blatchford et al. report that many pupils with SEN were routinely 'taught' for much of the time by TAs, rather than teachers (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell

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<sup>2</sup>What Hardy (2009) characterises as the 'obligatory' use of inverted commas to indicate that nothing is 'taken for granted' would be unhelpful given the number of times the words 'inclusion', 'inclusive' or 'SEN' is used here. However, the whole study aspires to contest the 'taken for grantedness' of these terms, especially the former.



and Webster 2009, pp. 6-7). Thus, the significance of the work of TAs for the education of such pupils seems beyond doubt.

### *Questions raised by substantive research in the field*

Two key areas of findings from substantive research in this area further contribute to the rationale for the study. First, some findings have been replicated over the years but with possible explanations little explored. Research repeatedly indicates that limitations in explicit communication and teamwork can threaten the effectiveness of TA support. Balshaw and Farrell's (2002) research indicates potential barriers through systems constraints such as shortage of time for communication or other management factors (p.48). Every interviewee in a study by Bedford et al. (2008) stated that more time for planning was needed (p.21). The DISS project, too, found 95% of secondary teachers surveyed said they had no planning or feedback time with TAs and the researchers found communication largely 'brief and *ad hoc*' (Blatchford, Russell and Webster 2012, p.60). The hectic pace in schools is not in doubt. However, time is found for many things and there are clear imperatives to communicate well, given the spending on TAs and potential impact on pupils.

One layer of explanation for the communication shortfall is that the TA role in inclusion is, in certain respects, implicit and unformulated, described by Swann and Loxley (1998) as 'unplanned drift' (p.157). Before Workforce Reform, growth in TA numbers in mainstream schools was perhaps mainly attributable to developments towards the inclusion of children with 'SEN' and this role may be perceived as developing in an '*ad hoc*' manner (Thomas 1992, p.2, Mansaray 2006 p.172, Giangreco and Doyle 2007, p.434) with a tendency to 'role creep' and lack of clarity (Blatchford et al. 2009, p.6). The Cambridge Primary Review even cites one TA as stating '... the nature of the job is not to know exactly what's going on' (Alexander 2010, p.448). This invites further examination, to look closely for possible explanations within what Hancock and Eyres (2004) describe as the 'systematic "invisibility" of paraprofessionals in the public services' (p.231).

The second set of findings from substantive research which contribute to the rationale for the present study are cautionary notes about outcomes sounded by

OfSTED (2006) and the DISS research (Blatchford et al. 2009). OfSTED note that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in mainstream schools, where teaching assistant support 'was the main type of provision' were less likely to make good academic progress than those with access to specialist teaching in similar schools (p.3). OfSTED thus recommended that schools should 'analyse critically their use and deployment of teaching assistants' (p.5). Given the scale of the DISS data, their key finding that 'the more support pupils received, the less progress they made' (Blatchford et al. 2009, p.2) is particularly alarming. The most recent SEN Green Paper specifically acknowledges this and discourages the practice of over-reliance on TA support (DfE 2011, p. 63). However, the vast majority of TA classroom support (74%) is for 'low-attaining' pupils and those with SEN (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.80). Thus, while a great deal of data is available and largely undisputed, there is a considerable imperative to explore possible processes at play in TA work and possible explanations for these data. Blatchford et al. themselves advocate 'more work on conceptualising the pedagogical role of TAs in their everyday interactions with pupils' (2009, p.10).

### *Status of inclusive education*

A third reason for continued research in areas related to the operation of inclusive education is widely-ranging evidence that the process of inclusive education has stalled, from OfSTED's (2004) finding that only a minority of mainstream schools meet the needs of pupils with SEN very well, to Daniels and Porter's (2007) finding for the National Primary Review that developments have been 'convoluted and ... change ... slow' (p.1). The Coalition Government's avowed response, to 'remove the bias towards inclusion' and offer 'real choice' (DfE 2011, p.5) may be part of the academisation and de-regulation movement, rather than wholesale provision of new special school places<sup>3</sup>, but it is undisputed that some pupils and parents seek sanctuary from the 'ableism and marketisation' of unreconstructed mainstream schools (Runswick-Cole 2011, p.117). While the narrative divides across ideological standpoints, from a failed inclusive system to one which has never truly been

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<sup>3</sup> The 'Next Steps' document (DfE 2012b), subsequent to the Green Paper, does not mention removing 'the bias to inclusion'.

implemented, it would appear that the stalling of inclusive education is commonly agreed ground and close examination an imperative. The aspiration is to contribute to understanding of inclusion by looking at the personal experiences and perceptions of TAs, in relation to their work and in relation to inclusion.

There are some interesting indications that key issues in the work of TAs relate to key issues in inclusive education generally. For example, Paliokosta and Blandford's (2010) 2-year study of 3 secondary schools, chosen for their very different cultures, notes key factors in the extent to which inclusion was achieved as being: school culture, differentiation, time limitations and teacher knowledge and conceptualisation (p.181). These all have distinct resonance with the wider literature and research findings on TAs, such as the DISS work.

#### *Personal professional experience of work with TAs*

My professional work includes tutoring TAs studying part-time for Foundation (FdA) and B.A (Hons) degrees. I visit them at work during their FdA course and also see TAs at work when I am observing trainee teachers. While TAs who are graduates are in a minority (about 15% of TAs nationally according to Blatchford et al. 2012, p.51), they are of direct professional interest. One 'critical incident' (Tripp 1993) encapsulates my desire to look more closely. I was observing a student teacher, close to the end of her PGCE year in a school in which she had already secured a post. The pupils in the group were all on the school's SEN register. Part-way through the lesson a TA arrived (from exam duties). Afterwards, the trainee teacher and I agreed that at around this point the pupils had become more relaxed and co-operative and the last part of the lesson was much the most successful. Where we differed was that she had not noticed the TA joining the group. This sums up my personal and professional perception that TAs often seem to contribute a great deal yet may appear to operate almost 'below the radar' of the school. OfSTED (2004) indeed suggest that given the investment in teaching assistants ... 'systems for managing their work and making use of the intelligence they can provide were surprisingly weak in many...schools' (p. 20). Thomas' 1992 statement (about classroom teams) that there has been limited 'attention to them as groups of people'

(p.xi) still rings true. Above all, therefore, the reason for the study is simply a 'lust of knowing' (Delamont 2002, p.1) more about the perceptions of TAs themselves operating at the 'chalk face' of inclusion.

## **B. Research aim and questions**

The central aim of the study is to contribute to understanding of TAs' perceptions of the work in which they are so extensively deployed, the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream secondary schools. The main research questions, "How do experienced Teaching Assistants (TAs) perceive their work in the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream secondary schools?" and 'Why do they perceive their work and interpret inclusion as they do?' are informed by several sub-questions:

- a) How, where and why do TAs position themselves, both physically and in relation to others in school?
- b) How and why do TAs respond to pupils during the lesson?
- c) How do TAs share their intelligence about their work with colleagues?
- d) How do TAs interpret inclusion and their work in relation to inclusion?
- e) What can we learn about the daily practice of inclusion from TAs?

This last question is the most important, aiming to explore the TAs' perceptions with insights drawn from the work of Goffman, Foucault and Derrida as 'explanans' or 'the explaining thing' (Luker 2008, p.52).

## **C. Methodological orientation**

This small-scale study uses elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to closely examine the words of TAs talking about their work. The project aspires to the interpretative tradition, in Thomas' terms (2009, p.9), looking to contribute to an understanding of what is going on and to make sense of it. It is neither predictive nor evaluative, but exploratory and theory-building. Epistemologically, the view is that there is no one 'correct telling', acknowledging the 'frailty of knowledge' (Thomas 2009, p ix). The central justification for the epistemological stance, methodology and

research design is one of fitness for purpose, the purpose being to explore TA perceptions and therefore their 'angle' on or interpretation of their work.

There is substantial support for the idea that exploring the micro context may be helpful in understanding complex educational events (Barton and Slee 1999, p.3, Del Rosario 2006, Sikes, Lawson and Parker 2007, Thomas and Loxley 2007, p.16, Armstrong 2008, p. 165). In theoretical terms, a reading of both Foucault and Derrida offers 'micro' focus for the proposed small-scale research with TAs in relation to the operation of inclusion, and discourse is central to both thinkers. Derrida is concerned with 'the small and inconspicuous repetitions that weave the precarious fabric of daily life' (Caputo 1997, p. 200), Foucault with the operation of power through 'capillaries' of 'dispersion, relays, networks, reciprocal supports, differences of potential, discrepancies ...' (1973a, p. 4). From the standpoint that discursive practices 'systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p. 49), then the words and understanding of TAs, so closely involved in classrooms, help form 'inclusion'. TAs will inevitably enact inclusion according to their understanding (Sikes et al. 2007, p. 355) and therefore it is important to consider their understanding.

The interest is in the TA voice in relation to their own experience, in this sense the phenomenological interest in personal construction of reality, in what an experience means for an individual and 'what is it like' to have lived it (Humphrey and Lewis 2008a, p.29). However, as Apple (2004) advocates, the aspiration is to combine this with critical social interpretation (p.132). Language and discourse as central to constructing social meaning are thus pivotal to the work. As the voices and words of TAs are intrinsic to the research question, discourse is a fitting approach. The relationship of talk to the deeply contested world of inclusion and SEN and its power balances demands a perspective which can capture the 'critical'. Gee's example that sedimented layers of meaning can be discerned through discourse analysis, even in the label on an aspirin bottle (Gee 1992, p.14, 2005 pp. 35-38, 2008, p.95) is compelling. CDA may discern 'frozen theories' (Gee 2008, p.97) or 'master myths' (2008, p. 111) which is precisely what is wanted in this study of 'inclusive education'.

## **D. Research Design**

The research comprises a pilot phase where materials in the public domain, 'official' Department for Education and Skills (DfES) films and Teacher's TV interview footage of TAs, are considered in the light of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The pilot helps develop a simple, systematic framework for applying elements of CDA to explore the words of TAs. This pilot is followed by the main research phase which is a semi-structured individual interview with each of 8 well-qualified and experienced TAs from a range of secondary schools. The interviews are then analysed using the CDA framework devised during the pilot phase.

### *Terminology*

While the terms used vary in different local authorities and job grading systems, the generic term 'Teaching Assistant' advocated by the DCSF (2007), is used throughout this work unless otherwise stated. The term 'para-professional', used in the U.S. and a few European countries, is used as a job title in this study only in citation. Instead, it is used primarily to indicate the broader meaning of assistant professionals in modern public services, where the deployment of TAs has some significant features in common with, for example, Community Support Officers in the Police Service. Some participants in this study and in the wider literature are Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) so, where relevant, this is also made clear and the phenomenon is discussed further in Chapter 5.

### *Pupils and Teachers*

This study is about TAs' construction of their own work and it does not elicit pupil voices, despite the unarguable importance of such consultation (Prout 2000, p. xi, Danby and Farrell 2005, p.49, Alexander 2010, p.143). During the research, teachers also regularly offered interviews since they assumed, as did critical friends, that the study sought triangulation through teacher reports. Such work is clearly valuable and exemplified, for example, by the DISS project. However, the focus and scale here are

wholly different and it is an interest in the ideas of the TAs themselves, their construction and experience of work in inclusion which drives this doctoral project. This is no intention to neglect pupils or teachers but simply to foreground TAs, just as other studies foreground the perceptions of pupils or teachers. It is TA voices that are at the heart of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review comprises five main sections, each informing the formulation of the current research. .

**Section A** explores the historical and policy framework in relation to the work of TAs. In short, it is argued that multi-stranded and complex roots have created ambiguities in TA work, persisting throughout the period from the Plowden Report (DES 1967) to the present day. These ambiguities are linked here to the recurring themes in research including *ad hoc* development of the role, shortfall in explicit communication and limitations in the conceptualisation of inclusion and of power.

**Section B** reviews what is already known and indicated from substantive research on the work of TAs, taking as the starting point the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) research (Blatchford et al. 2012) and then highlighting research which broadly supports and aligns with, or contradicts, its key findings.

**Section C** explores the specific grounding for this current study, in particular those areas of the work of TAs which seem less well established or where recurrent findings lack explanation and theoretical analysis. While a great deal is known at a technical and descriptive level, key areas which have, again, been relatively neglected both in practice and in the literature are a focus on the operation of power and its relationship to inclusion. Default positions may be discerned as operating in the resulting gap, including those of ‘velcro’ or dependency-inducing models of TA work, core-periphery assumptions and reliance on emotional labour. An argument is developed that further ‘micro’ focus on how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences is of value.

**Section D** summarises theoretical insights from Foucault and Derrida which inform the study, its reading of the literature and its methodology.

**Section E** explains the specific focus on secondary schools and on the perceptions of a small number of TAs.



## **A: Historical and policy framework**

Consideration of the historical background and policy context for the 'huge... unprecedented increase' in TA numbers in England (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.5) reveals at least four related drivers and strands of thinking which recur throughout the literature.

Broadly speaking, the first strand is the idea of general classroom assistance aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Blatchford et al. (2012) usefully point out that this element further divides into 'indirect' versus 'direct' TA roles, the first indicating the release of teachers from more routine tasks so that they can focus on teaching, the second implying a direct pedagogical engagement from TAs (p.11). The second main driver reflected in the literature relates to teacher supply, retention and support (Bach, Kessler and Heron 2006, p.6) and the third to pupils with SEN and / or disability. The fourth element is harder to sum up as it is linked to public policy initiatives and is therefore dynamic. Thus, for example, at times policy appears more or less emancipatory and related to social justice. While the specific 'SEN' strand is the focus of this study and of the majority of the literature discussed here, each of these four strands is discussed separately in the next section. However, they all co-exist, closely affecting each other, and, crucially, are lived out in schools often by the same person, the same TA, in the same lesson. This phenomenon seems to lie close to the heart of the complexity and inherent anomalies in the TA field.

The history of assistants may be traced back at least as far as the 19<sup>th</sup> century pupil-teachers and, arguably, to the ancient Greeks (Watkinson 2003, p.13, Watkinson 2008, p.1). In the 1920s, Margaret McMillan, in her pioneering 'nurture' schools, advocated employment of 'supplementary staff' as well as teachers (Mansbridge 1932, p.148) and the National Nursery Nurse Examination Board was set up in 1945 (Watkinson 2003, p.13). The specific ancillary role probably originates in parent volunteers and paid school auxiliaries in the period after World War II (Hancock, Hall, Cable and Eyres 2010, p.98). However, the place of 'ancillaries' in the school system is perhaps first made explicit in the Plowden Report (DES 1967). In the context of trying to reduce class size and implement progressive plans for primary education,

Plowden sought to develop learning and ease the burden on (already scarce) teachers, advocating the employment of 'ancillaries' in schools, including 'nursery assistants' for the youngest pupils and 'teachers' aides' for the 5 to 13 age range (DES 1967, p.370). Plowden reported that the number of 'nursery assistants' was already increasing rapidly (p.318) but, even here, notes that 'there is little logical pattern to be seen in the employment of unqualified teachers and of ancillary helpers' (p.318). While the report tends to focus on the supply of these staff, questions raised still echo today, including variability in provision with 'some authorities... hesitating to employ helpers of this kind because of their cost, because they are uncertain how to use them or because they share the anxiety of some teachers about "dilution" (p.319)', the last an early hint of unease about power-sharing and professional boundaries.

As well as the first strand of improving classroom standards and the second, of easing the teachers' load, the third strand of TA work is also seen in Plowden. In the entirely separate section on the education of 'handicapped' children in ordinary classes, Plowden states that 'even one or two severely handicapped children add greatly to the responsibilities of a busy teacher in a large class. In such instances, some ancillary help may be essential' (DES 1967, p.300).

The fourth strand of TA work in public policy initiatives can be glimpsed, at least in the U.S. context, with emancipatory origins which Lewis (2003) locates in the civil rights and women's movements. 'Instructional aides', often women from minority groups, were recruited for HeadStart and to support bilingual learners, as a 'bridge to the poor' (Lewis, p.93) and as cultural brokers able to negotiate between majority and minority cultures (p. 94). Lewis is one of many writers subsequently referring to TAs as having close links with parents, possibly living on the same estates and the same neighbourhoods and having social links through their own children (Lewis 2003, p.92, Roaf 2003, p.236, Mansaray 2006 p.180-181, Giangreco and Doyle 2007, p.432, Barkham 2008, pp.846-847, Graves 2011, p.16 and Blatchford et al. 2012, p.125). While the 'cultural broker' expectations are problematic, not least with participants probably unprepared for such roles (Lewis 2003, p.107), this element of 'being in

between' as mediators is noted by Howes (2003) in various American studies (p.150) and is also explored by Mansaray (2006) and others in the U.K including Alborz et al.(2009b, p.1).

In more recent times, the increase in TA numbers documented in chapter 1 reflects, at least in part, the wider social aspiration of the New Labour period of UK public policy which avowed, at least in principle, the idea that 'every child matters', with accompanying public expenditure on schooling (Bach, Kessler and Heron 2006, p. 5, Veck 2009, p.41).

The recruitment of 'special needs assistants' in England after the Warnock Report (DES 1978) and the subsequent 1981 Education Act is chronicled by Swann and Loxley (1998, p.142), Watkinson (2003, p.15), Bach et al. (2006), Hancock, Hall, Cable and Eyres (2010) and Blatchford et al. (2012, p.14). Local Management of Schools, introduced in 1988, allowed 'creativity' in general staffing decisions and a matching emphasis on managing costs (Watkinson 2003, p.33). Generalist classroom assistants also continued to be recruited in the 1990s with specialists in core subjects from 1994 (Watkinson 2003, p.29) and, increasingly since around 1998, for a range of booster and intervention groups as the National Curriculum and associated standards regime was implemented (Swann and Loxley 1998, p. 142, HMI 2002, p.4, Watkinson 2003, p. 22, Mistry, Burton and Brundrett 2004, p.126, Bach et al. 2006, p.6, Hancock et al. 2010, p.98, Blatchford et al. 2012, p. 9) with its 'increasingly tightly defined norms' (Swann and Loxley 1998 p.142).

Terms for and categories of TAs have varied (Swann and Loxley 1998, p. 143, Quicke 2003, p. 71, Watkinson 2003, p. 2, Hancock and Colloby 2007, p.7, Veck 2009, p.53) but the four strands of improving learning, supporting teachers, including pupils with SEN and a broader sense of social inclusion all continue with varying emphases and, crucially, still with little explicit discussion on how these strands inter-relate. Power is critical in all these strands, in the first two, power in relationship to teachers' professional boundaries. In the third and fourth strands, a great deal seems to be asked of the TA project as a whole where SEN provision (third strand) and

social inclusion (the fourth) all depend to some degree on the intervention of TAs, apparently without commensurate re-conceptualisation of schooling.

The New Labour sea-change in the TA field was the wide-reaching national educational policy 'Workforce Reform'. With key elements distilled in a National Agreement explicitly designed to address a teacher recruitment and retention crisis (DfES 2003, p.1, Bach et al., p.6, Alexander 2010, p.445), Workforce Reform 'foregrounded the importance of assistants' (Cremin et al. 2005, p. 413) through each phase of its implementation, namely the removal of routine bureaucratic tasks from teachers in 2003, the 'rarely cover' development of 2004 and the introduction of planning, preparation and assessment time (PPA) in 2006 (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.10). As well as foregrounding the role of TAs, Workforce Reform encompassed the introduction of Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) and cover supervisors. Many of the occupational standards linked to HLTA status would once have 'only been associated with the responsibilities of qualified teachers' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.12). Thus, crucially, at a key and deeply contested moment, the National Agreement can be seen to employ 'nebulous' wording (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.12) echoed in regulations introduced under the Education Act 2002 where, for example, TAs do not 'teach' but make a 'substantial contribution to the teaching' (p.12). Variation and fluidity are clearly lived out in practice. Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe's (2011) survey is typical in finding differences both with and between different English regions concerning the degree to which TAs report supporting individuals, small groups and taking whole classes (pp.79-80). All 200 TA respondents, however, took some whole-class responsibility, albeit for short periods and with some degree of debate about what constitutes whole-class responsibility (p.81).

While the scenario is certainly not unique to education, there remains confusion at many levels in a national picture which is 'so diffuse and complicated' (Watkinson 2003, p.34). Just for example, Burgess and Mayes (2009) of the Open University indicate that linking foundation degrees and Higher Level Teaching Assistant professional standards would deliver training 'equivalent to the initial teacher training programme' (p.24). However, it is hard to see how this could be the case since

foundation degrees are level 4 / 5 on the national qualifications framework compared to QTS which requires a level 6 qualification.

As well as its significance for TAs and for its potential to blur TA / teacher roles, the significance of Workforce Reform should not be underestimated for schools in general nor for the field of SEN. The Training and Development Agency (TDA, no date) itself stated that this remodelling agenda underpins other DfES initiatives (p. 7) and that 'Remodelling is ... fundamental to raising standards and will form the context for *all* other changes and developments' (p. 9, this study's italics). Thus, while it may present as a pedagogy-free zone, Mansaray (2006) argues (of TAs) that 'the restructuring of professional roles will have significant pedagogic implications' (p. 184) which go beyond even Blatchford et al.'s (2012) view of public service modernisation as provision of cheaper workers (p.16) and closer to the heart of the professional status and standing of teachers, arguably, the 'systematic deskilling of teachers by central government' (Swann and Loxley 1998, p.143).

Beyond the immediate matter of teacher supply and retention, the growth of paraprofessional numbers in policing, health and education was explicitly presented as 'best practice' in modernising public services in general (Cabinet Office 2003, p.20, Hancock et al. 2010, p.98, Smith 2012, p.21). Bach et al. (2006) indicate that this is part of the shift towards 'new public management' or NPM, itself associated with Taylorisation of work where less skilled tasks are 'cheapened and delegated to support staff' (p.4). Bach et al. argue that, despite this growth in public assistant roles, there is a dearth of analysis of the 'structure, operation and consequences' of them, with TAs, for example, presented 'very much as a means to an end' (p.3). Writing from an industrial relations standpoint, Bach et al. (2006) indicate a long-standing tendency for employers to allocate tasks after workers have been recruited (p. 4). In Gunter's view (2007), too, there was no attempt to use research evidence 'to locate the skills and knowledge of adults in schools with learners and learning' (p. 6), the base being 'organisational rather than pedagogic' (p. 7).

While not directly or explicitly related to special educational needs provision, the significance of Workforce Reform for the SEN field also seems considerable. Blatchford et al. (2012) highlight the 'muddled' reasoning that TA roles are supportive of pedagogy but not teaching *per se* (p.12). The justification that they play a secondary and less instructional role and only with small groups is much less plausible when applied to pupils with SEN (p. 12) since we know that the 'vast majority' of TA support is for lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.93).

In summary, right from the outset, the work of TAs has been a point of intersection between different but related strands of educational thinking and policy. Whether inherent and unavoidable, a matter for celebration or even regret, the apparent lack of delineation, and even 'confusion' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.13) between these strands seems uncontested.

## **B: The DISS Research and what is already ‘known’**

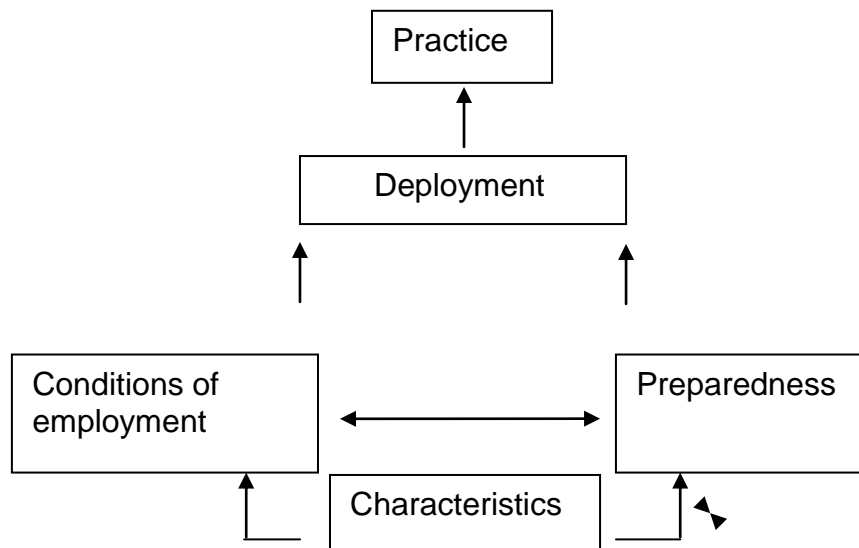
This section reviews what is already known about the work of TAs and thus begins with the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) research, the giant of the field. Blatchford, Russell and Webster’s 2012 book summarises the project and a range of interim publications and their five government-published reports (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.20) and indicates a forthcoming ‘toolkit’ to address ‘key issues for action’ (p.150). There is wide acknowledgement of the validity, scope and unique contribution of the research (Fletcher-Campbell 2010, p.339, Giangreco 2010, p. 341), the three aims of which were to provide an ‘accurate and systematic’ picture of TA characteristics, deployment and impact (Blatchford, Russell and Webster 2012, p.18).

Blatchford et al.’s (2012) confidence in the ‘unique’ (p. 7) ‘sophisticated’ nature of their research and ‘the veracity of the findings’ (p.20) is no guarantee of reliability and validity in itself. However, the sheer scale and resources and careful design of the research are beyond doubt and rated as high quality evidence by the systematic EPPI review (Alborz et al. 2009b, p.37). DISS was naturalistic and non-experimental work with strand one addressing the first aim through three biennial questionnaire surveys from 2003 to 2008. Over 18,000 questionnaires and 1,600 time-logs were returned (2012, pp.18-19). Strand two wave one (2005 – 2006) focussed on impact using pupil achievement data, case studies, teacher ratings and systematic observation and interview. Strand two, wave two (2007 – 2008) included a second set of case studies, interviews and observations.

The DISS research thus provides a bank of information about the characteristics, conditions of employment, preparedness, deployment and practice of TAs. In short, and at the risk of simplifying complex research and carefully phrased findings, each of these dimensions was demonstrated to operate less than optimally and affect the impact of TAs. The ‘Wider Pedagogical Role’ (WPR) model, illustrated at Figure 2.1 is the team’s explanation for their key finding that ‘the more support pupils received,

the less progress they made' (2009, p.2, 2012, p.38) despite control for other variables including SEN (2012, pp. 39-40).

**Figure 2.1**



**WPR (wider pedagogical role) Blatchford et al. (2012, p.45).**

Conditions of employment were such that many support staff worked unpaid hours (Blatchford et al. 2012, p. 56). Variable levels of training and limited preparedness for both teachers and TAs and limited time for liaison (p.68) were also noted and confirmed by questionnaires, case study and observation (p.60). Only 1 in 20 secondary teachers had timetabled time with a TA for planning, preparation and feedback (pp. 120-121). Crucially, pupils with SEN interacted more with TAs, those without SEN interacted more with teachers (2012, p.83). TAs were found, in practice, to be deployed in a direct instructional role, routinely supporting low attaining pupils and those with SEN with a substantial degree of separation from teachers and the rest of the class both within but also away from the classroom (p.92). For example, almost all the team's observations of TA intervention for low attaining pupils in secondary schools took place away from the class and the teacher (p.84). Even when support is provided 1:1 in class, Blatchford et al. note the phenomenon of 'stereo teaching' where pupils tend to be exposed to two voices, the teacher and the



TA, often talking about the same thing (2012, p. 87). In addition, some TAs felt 'vital information' regarding pupil engagement or progress did not feed back into planning (p.86). For Blatchford et al., then, all this is alternative rather than additional support (p.30). Finally, analysis of practice indicated substantive differences in this support in that, for example, TA talk tended to statements, prompts (p.97) and task completion (98), closing down rather than opening up understanding (p.117) while teachers' talk tended more to explanation, cognitive focus and feedback on learning.

The DISS headline finding that TA support had a significant negative impact on academic attainment is challenging and perhaps counter-intuitive, extra help for teachers generally being assumed to be 'a Good Thing' (Thomas 1992, p. xi). However, it is not wholly surprising. There had been evidence from HMI (2002) that the presence of TAs improves the quality of *teaching* but this was also acknowledged to lack evidence of impact on pupil achievement (p. 5). Some research has reported *perceptions* of effectiveness (for example, Robson, Bailey and Mendick 2008). One study demonstrating a positive, statistically significant, relationship between successful pupil outcomes and greater expenditure on TAs was that of Brown and Harris (2010)<sup>4</sup>. They recognise however that their 83 secondary schools represented 25% of schools approached and were, in any event, schools achieving well above national average levels of attainment (p. 2). Where there is evidence of success it tends to be in short-term targeted interventions such as Savage and Carless' (2005) 9-week intervention with 6 year-old 'poor' readers. However, earlier work such as Giangreco and Doyle's (2007) review of literature from the mid 1990s to 2004, indicates a dearth of either convincing arguments for the deployment of TAs or unequivocal evidence of their efficacy. Klassen (2001) found that outcomes for 67 students statemented for Specific Learning Difficulties and receiving long-term additional support differed little from 'untreated' dyslexics in previous studies (p.131). Cremin et al. (2005) point out that while some small-scale descriptive studies indicate benefits from TA support, larger scale longitudinal work such as that of Gerber et al. (2001) in the United States found no differences in outcomes (cited in Cremin et al. 2005, p.415).

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<sup>4</sup> Brown and Harris are associated with London's Institute of Education, the same institution as the DISS researchers.

Much smaller- scale studies than the DISS project arrive at similar findings. Dillow (2010), for example, as a result of an ethnographic approach with 7 TAs and her own work as a TA, arrives at some predictably similar conclusions, for example that TAs will do a better job if well-prepared (p.85) and carefully deployed (p.57). Swann and Loxley's (1998) evidence from a survey of 147 specialist TAs from 10 LAs suggests that a focus on the training of TAs themselves is limited by lack of an accompanying focus on effective deployment (p.158). Watkinson, too, in 2003 was arguing, based on work with TAs as a 'teacher, head, adviser, researcher' (p.2) that, regardless of levels of training, 'TAs are only as effective as their use, deployment and management' (pp. 165-166). Indeed, Watkinson's (2003, p.11) schematic highlighting 'interrelated constituents' in the work of TAs has some similarities with the WPR model (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.45) as indicated in figure 2.2:

**Figure 2.2**

<b>Watkinson's (2003) 'interrelated constituents' (p.11)</b>	<b>Blatchford et al.'s (2012) WPR model (p.45)</b>
Characteristics	The TAs themselves
Conditions of employment	The school (including employment procedures)
Preparedness	Professional development
Deployment	The role
Practice	Teaching and learning

**Some common elements in the findings of Watkinson (2003) and the DISS research (2012).**

There was also sustained evidence, pre-dating DISS, that the presence of TAs reduces the time a teacher spends with pupils (De Vault et al. cited by Thomas 1992, p.41, OfSTED 2004, p. 17, Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron and Fialka 2005, p.31, Shah 2007, p.435). Lack of role clarity is also not new. For example, Humphrey and Lewis (2008b) found, in case studies of four secondary schools, that it was not

always clear whether differentiation was the responsibility of the teacher or an assistant (p. 137).

Comparing the DISS research project with studies in the USA, Giangreco (2010), indicates marked similarities (p. 342) not least in 'perpetual concerns and ambiguity about the appropriateness of ... increasingly instructional roles' (p.341). Blatchford et al's (2012) findings in relation to task completion are also seen in OfSTED's (2004) analysis that too much of what was planned by teachers for TAs focussed on planning how pupils with SEN could be kept engaged rather than next steps in learning (p.216). Blatchford et al's point about teacher / TA explanation is even echoed in the words of a 10 year old pupil quoted by Fraser and Meadows (2008), 'the TA might explain it differently and the teacher might explain it a bit more' (p. 359).

The positive elements of TA work in the findings of Blatchford et al. are also reflected elsewhere. Acknowledgement of the invaluable role of TAs in general is widely cited (HMI 2002, p.4, Roaf 2003, p. 230, Watkinson 2003, pp.18-19, Giangreco et al. 2005, p. 28, Woolfson and Truswell 2005, p.65, Bach et al. 2006, p.19, Johnson 2006, p.28, Barkham 2008, p.842, Alexander 2010, p.448). Blatchford et al. (2012), report that teachers both broadly welcome TAs (p. 8) and report reduced levels of stress and increased job satisfaction (pp. 26-27). In the same vein, Symes and Humprey (2011), in a study of 15 TAs in 4 secondary schools, cite a TA feeling that 'the teacher completely relies on me' (p.62). Emam and Farrell also report expressions of indispensability by teachers (2009, p.416). Blatchford et al. (2012) would add that reports of the benefits of TAs from teachers and management tend to be 'impressionistic' rather than based on evidence of outcomes (p.31).

The further benefits of TA support indicated by the DISS research are based on increased individual attention and classroom control (2012 p.30) and increases in positive approaches to learning (PAL), including children working more independently and confidently and with less distraction. Although mainly seen in year nine within the DISS work (Blatchford et al. 2012, pp.36-37), these findings also find support

elsewhere. For example, interview and observation data from Woolfson and Truswell's (2005) work in three schools in a Scottish local authority found strong perceptions of positive effects on pupils' personal, social and behavioural development.

Extensive work has already been done in schools, seeking to establish, discuss and extend the features of good practice in deployment. Watkinson (2003, 2008) for example, has worked with Devon schools and Balshaw and Farrell (2002) in Cheshire, Harrow and Salford. Given this and much other work, therefore, *why* might TAs seem so often to be deployed and prepared with less than optimal care and *how* might the process of providing TA support lead to less teacher contact for pupils with SEN? Similarly, findings that pupils may gain in engagement and in positive approaches to learning, rather than in general academic attainment, seem to cry out for exploration and explanation. This current research aims to contribute to possible explanations for the headline DISS evidence and other recurrent findings.

## **SECTION C: Grounding for the current study**

To close in further on the specific grounding for this study, while substantive areas of research on the work of TAs are well-developed, others seem less well established. In addition, research findings are replicated over and over, yet seem to lack explanation and theoretical analysis. Twin areas which have been relatively neglected are the operation of inclusion and of power. Several default positions may operate in the resulting gap and an argument is here developed that a further 'micro' focus on how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences would be of value.

Much of the existing literature is fundamentally managerialist or technicist rather than pedagogical, as Devecchi and Rouse (2010) put it 'descriptive and prescriptive' (p. 91) and firmly within the 'functionalist and managerial' paradigm (p.93). Giangreco and Doyle's (2007) extensive international review of literature in the field documents what Cremin et al. (2005) describe as an area 'top-heavy' with 'what is already known' including growth in numbers of TAs, job roles and training issues (Cremin et al. p. 414, Veck 2009, p. 41). Giangreco and Doyle (2007) themselves characterise the majority of research as 'quantitative and qualitative descriptive studies ... a few single-subject experimental designs' and a few 'evaluation studies' on models of teamwork (p. 433). Studies include examination of training (for example, Swann and Loxley 1998), co-operation and co-ordination between TAs and teachers (for example, Eyres, Cable, Hancock and Turner 2004, Gerschel 2005) and on optimisation of practice, for example through training and reflection (Pearson, Chambers and Hall 2003, Collins and Simco 2006). Thus, a good deal is known about what TAs *do*, augmented now by the DISS research, looking at both deployment and impact.

Less well-developed areas of research in this field include what Cremin et al. (2005) call 'ways in which support works in classrooms' (p.414) with the related 'interpersonal and professional uncertainties' which this brings to school dynamics (p.415). Cremin et al.'s (2005) suggestion that there is a great deal either unknown or

worthy of consideration here (p. 415) still holds. In a strong example of the field, Cremin et al. (2005)<sup>5</sup> position their own work on effectiveness as 'idiographic rather than nomothetic' (p. 426). Their action research design investigates and evaluate models of TA deployment, 'room management', 'zoning' and 'reflective teamwork' in 6 primary schools. The researchers record children's engagement, employing video recording using what they describe as a 'simple on-off task dichotomy' (p.418). However, although the interviews hint at qualitative approaches and participant views are reported, the discourse is of science, of baseline and of intervention. Bar charts showing engagement percentages are provided and the discussion is quantitative with statistical significance and possible regression to the mean discussed but no critical consideration of what the children's 'engagement' might signify. In effect, the implication is that this engagement can be known via videotape and by *measures* of engagement. Being 'on-task' is the undisputed given. The nature of what inclusive practice might or might not be is not problematised even though the work was part of an LA's 'Inclusive Schools Project'.

A further gap in existing literature is the lack of explanation for recurrent research findings in the field. As noted in Chapter 1, research repeatedly indicates that limitations in communication and teamwork threaten effectiveness. Balshaw and Farrell's (2002) research indicates potential barriers in 'systems' constraints such as shortage of time for communication or other management factors (p.48). Based on complementary studies by the authors and linked work by Balshaw on the Good Practice Guide on Working with Teaching Assistants (DfEE 2000), work with four local authorities indicates that lack of time for joint planning was a 'major issue' (p.10). Lack of time to plan has been widely reported over the years (Moyles and Suschitzky 1997, p. 4, Swann and Loxley 1998, p.149, Mistry et al. 2004, p. 133, Sorsby 2004, p.58, Hammett and Burton 2005, p.308, Thornton and Hedges 2006, Anderson and Finney 2008, p. 78, Barkham 2008, p.842, Bedford et al. 2008, p. 21,

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<sup>5</sup> Cremin et al. 2005 and Giangreco et al. 2001 are the only other studies on TA impact upon teachers ranked as high weight of evidence, alongside the DISS study in the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordination Centre (EPPI) work by Alborz et al. 2009b,( p.37). EPPI's systematic reviews are part-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and associated with the Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations.

Blatchford et al. 2009, p. 5, Devecchi and Rouse 2010, p. 94, Symes and Humphrey 2011, p.60, Blatchford et al. 2012, p. 60).

Clearly there are practical constraints but time is found for other central concerns. The lack of systematic planning time could be linked to *ad hoc* development of the TA role (Thomas 1992, p. 2, Swann and Loxley 1998, p. 158, Mansaray 2006 p.172, Giangreco and Doyle 2007, p.434), 'role creep' and lack of clarity (Watkinson 2003, p.7, Blatchford et al. 2009, p.6) discussed in Chapter 1 and also perhaps grounded in the multi-stranded historical development of TA work outlined in Section A of this chapter. However, given the weight of evidence over at least 15 years it seems more pertinent than ever to explore any explanations for lack of time to communicate, *ad hoc* development and their possible interrelationship.

Alongside the tendency to technicist and descriptive research (however high in quality) and limited interrogation of explanations for recurrent research findings, a case is next developed which argues that there has been a relative lack of attention to and theorisation of the work with TAs in relation first to inclusion and secondly, in relation to power. Default positions resulting from this vacuum are explored. With pivotal significance for the research, the importance of the 'voice' of TAs is then discussed.

### TAs and Inclusion

Inclusion is at the heart of the current study, not least since many commentators have criticised the treatment of the term 'inclusion' as a 'buzzword' (Thomas and O'Hanlon in Thomas and Loxley 2007, p. vii, Todd, 2007, p.8) rather than as a concept for deconstruction (Slee and Allan 2001). Differing meanings are associated with the term 'inclusion', such as:

- 'mainstreaming' of pupils, incorporating stances such as the 'full inclusionist' position of every child attending their local school and the UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994) with its hedged adoption of the 'principles' of

inclusive education except where there are 'compelling reasons for doing otherwise' (UNESCO 1994, p. ix, Dyson 1999, p.37).

- human rights and 'freedom and justice', typified by writers such as Barton (2003, p. 22) and linked to a greater or lesser degree with radical, transformative views of society.
- 'equal opportunities' and acceptance of diversity (Thomas, Walker and Webb, 1998, p.15).
- the affective and experiential, given Polk's view that 'for many children the experience of school is the daily experience of humility and pain' (cited by Slee 2011, p.12).

Thomas and Loxley's (2007) analysis of inclusion policy also helpfully refers to 'problematic issues of nested (and often disjointed) policies ... which percolate in and around institutions' (p.103). They advocate Fulcher's view of policy 'as a continual process, wherein formulation and implementation take place at all levels within the education system' (Fulcher 1989 cited in Thomas and Loxley 2007, p. 104). Thus, as Slee suggests, 'all manner of thinking, discourse and activity' may 'pass itself off as inclusive' (2006, p.111) including re-location of special education. More sophisticated conceptualisations of inclusion align with Topping and Maloney's (2005) 'expanding levels' of inclusion (p.6). Here the scope of full inclusion would encompass pupils attending mainstream school and successively attaining social and emotional inclusion, with full participation and achievement. If policy in practice is the outcome of interpretation, struggle and contestation at all levels (p. 104), then the rationale here is that TAs are often very closely involved at the operational level in this complex and contested field.

The premise here is that there is wide agreement that full inclusion of pupils with SEN is far from achieved whether from one ideological standpoint, where pupils with SEN struggle in mainstream school and should be 'returned' to special schools, to the polar opposite standpoint that inclusion has never been implemented. From this latter perspective, 'poor, non- white and disabled children' continue to be excluded by the 'surveillance' and tracking of the standards agenda (Runswick-Cole 2011, p. 117). While few in public debate explicitly contest the desire to remove barriers for



disabled pupils, the issue of what pupils are to be included *in* is often sidestepped, as Benjamin (2002) argues, given 'the formal work of pursuing the competitive standards agenda and .... dominant versions of success' (p. 56). Benjamin's 'elision of failure' in New Labour's inclusion policies where euphemisms and re-framings (pp.60-63) help contribute to the 'daily reinscription' of the standards agenda as 'common sense' (p. 63) are very pertinent to the TA role and remain so under a Coalition Government who were able to make the stated aim of removing 'the bias towards inclusion' (DfE 2011, p.5).

The task of inclusion remains Sisyphean (Slee 2012, p. 42) as long as 'out of school' (p.42) and perhaps 'out of class' experiences' are simply Foucault's re-calibrated exclusionary system (Slee, p. 43). Indeed, it has become increasingly easy to be classed as failing, due to the combination of rising normative standards and an 'expanding range of ... syndromes' (Slee, p.47) against national and global growth in inequalities. Slee argues that the tendency of inclusive policy to emphasise diagnosis and individual support has effectively given teachers 'permission to withdraw while specialists or hired aides get on with the task of inclusion' (p. 47).

Thus, it is hardly surprising that a scarcely developed, unarticulated or, even retrograde understanding of inclusion at a policy level extends to the field of TA work and the related research. The DISS reading of inclusion, for example, is one of mainstreaming. When the DISS team assert that the use of TAs 'has helped inclusion at the expense of pupils' learning' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.134), they can only imply an understanding of inclusion which does not encompass, and is separate from, learning. As Ebersold (2003) argues, when the pivotal relationship between disabled and non-disabled people is forgotten there is a risk that mainstreaming becomes an end in itself (p. 96) and children may remain only integrated and relatively marginalised with insufficient attention to their academic progress.

Lack of conceptual engagement with inclusion can be seen to reinforce deployment of TAs in 'softening the blow' of mainstream education (Wedell 2005, p. 5) in pursuit of Giangreco and Broer's 'analgesic' (2005, cited in Blatchford et al. 2012, p.15).

Giangreco et al. (2005) argue that providing paraprofessional support may 'delay attention' to necessary changes in schools (p.32), sidestepping the matter of power. Thus, Blatchford et al.'s calls for 'tightening-up' of practice' (2012, p.122) bypass more fundamental questions about the mechanisms that are to be tightened. For example, the recommendation that teachers must monitor outputs from TA led sessions (p.1323) presumably does not wholly contest the underlying assumptions of separation. It is the uncontested view of inclusion and an outdated deficit model of SEN which also underlie Fletcher-Campbell and Balshaw's critiques of the DISS study (Balshaw 2010, p. 338, Fletcher-Campbell 2010, p. 340). Typicality is thus taken for granted at the expense of 'reconceptualising engagement in terms of exclusionary processes, status and power' (Fletcher-Campbell p. 340). Indeed, even as they refute these critiques, Blatchford et al. simply reiterate their findings, suggesting that Balshaw and Fletcher-Campbell do not 'engage with .... the heart of the problem: the negative effect of TAs on pupil attainment' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.136).

### TAs and Power

Consideration of power, influence and control are key aspects of the current study. While schools are often depicted as harmonious places of 'love and care', they can also be seen as 'about power and control' (Mansaray 2006, p.182 citing Hargreaves 1999). Struggles for power, however polite, can be seen in much of the controversy which has accompanied the role of TAs from Plowden's reference to the early anxiety of some teachers about 'dilution' (DES 1967, p.319) through to the National Union of Teachers' continued refusal to sign the National Agreement on Workforce Reform (Bach, Kessler and Heron, p. 4). The DISS researchers too, report that despite the positive views about TAs, the role of TAs was more 'problematic and contentious' than it first appears (Blatchford et al. 2012, p. 69). At the extreme end of the stereotypical 'paint pot washers' line of thought, Nigel de Gruchy of the NASUWT teacher union used the phrase 'pig ignorant peasants' in relation to TAs in 2001, remarks he said were taken out of context and for which he apologised (Kerry 2005, p.376).

The inherently nebulous instances of official wording where TAs do not teach but make a 'substantial contribution to the teaching' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p. 12) fuel ambiguity. Despite reassurances about protection of teaching (and TA) roles however, as Howes (2003) points out, in complex educational ecologies teamwork 'cannot be easily subsumed into ... leaders and led, managers and managed' (p. 152). Thus for example, Blatchford et al. point out that the lack of time for liaison between teachers and TAs (2012, pp. 12-13) is particularly striking, given the emphasis in the National Agreement on TAs working under the guidance of teachers. In a closely argued reading of the HMI / OfSTED report of 2002, Quicke (2003) notes that the report states that no-one should 'pretend that teaching assistants are teachers' yet goes on to suggest that good practice as a TA involves the core skills of teachers (Quicke, p.72). Quicke argues that the report leaves TAs in 'an ambiguous position with no clear boundaries' (p.72) and that there are ideological and convenient financial reasons for this (p.74).

Following the ideological line of thought, Quicke (2003) goes further in arguing that 'all governments in recent years have sought to construct the nature of teaching and the identity of teachers' (p.72). His stance is that teacher autonomy is broken, since assistants teach and are by definition dependent so teachers have become line managers, manoeuvred into a role of 'managed professionals delivering a prescribed curriculum' and 'line managers to assistants' (p. 72). Thus, for Quicke, the debate about the role of assistants is 'part of the insinuation of managerialist assumptions into the very heart of the education process' (p. 72). Edmond and Price (2009) also indicate a policy discourse where teachers are portrayed as having no time for pastoral care if they are to concentrate on teaching and learning (p. 307). It is interesting to note that in the context of modernisation of public services in general, there are reported parallels, for example in nursing, where the division of labour between nurses and newly introduced healthcare assistants (HCAs) coincided with the full implementation of the targets agenda (Smith 2012, p.22).

As well as affecting teachers, underlying themes of power and control are pertinent for pupils. On the basis of the DISS research, it seems clear that TAs ‘almost never support middle or high attaining pupils’ (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.103). Indeed, Veck (2009) argues that ‘fixed thinking’ about disability in the Warnock Report (1978) underlies the ‘crucial’ need for ancillaries if ‘othered’ children are to join an ‘ordinary’ class (p. 43). From the student perspective, Giangreco and Doyle (2007) point out that the scenario of providing the least qualified personnel to ‘provide primary instruction’ to the most complex learners is not only illogical but would be unacceptable if applied to students without SEN (p. 432)<sup>6</sup>. Again, there are some parallels in healthcare where the avowed aspiration of the HCA role as relieving nurses of routine ‘reinforces the stereotype of personal care as lower status work’ (Smith 2012, p. 170). The suspicion of education on the cheap (Quicke 2003, p.72) for pupils with SEN is also commonplace. For Ebersold (2003), TAs are ‘placed in a relationship of subordination to the teacher, without recognition of their specific skills’ (p. 103) so that practice becomes more about meeting various stakeholder needs than those of children. Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) argue ‘unless we realise that current arrangements are themselves the cause of the problem’ many lower attaining pupils and those with SEN will suffer (p.8).

In addition to these teacher and pupil-centred concerns, issues of power are also of concern to TAs themselves (Alexander 2010, p. 448). TAs may perceive themselves as relatively powerless within schools (Watkinson 2003, p.63, Hammett and Burton 2005, p. 300, Lowe and Pugh 2007, p. 28, Dunne, Goddard and Woolhouse 2008, p.243, Veck 2009, p. 46), ‘unseen and unregarded’ (Dillow 2010, p. 4). This is echoed by the children aged 5 to 11, interviewed by Fraser and Meadows (2008) who expressed the same clear perception of the hierarchical power balance between teachers and TAs (p. 356). Barkham (2008) highlights the contradiction that while teachers’ roles may be seen as threatened by the role of TAs, assistants may still feel like second class citizens (p.841). A similar point is made by Bedford et al. (p.13), while Mansaray describes a senior TA as *being* ‘the behaviour management’ for her school (p. 177) yet at times she herself is ‘told off’ as she is called away to

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<sup>6</sup> Edmond and Price (2009) note that the gulf may widen if teaching moves towards ‘Masters’ status, with the ‘most problematic’ children taught by lower status, less qualified staff (p. 301).

incidents across the school (p.177). Variability across teachers and departments is also documented (Hammett and Burton 2005, p. 304).

In an interesting variant on the theme of power, both Veck (2009) and Clark (2010) refer to physical spaces. Clark's oral-history work on a primary school in the period 1977 to 1993 portrays the 'welfare room' as informal and less 'official' , in a sense offering freedom as 'in-between spaces may be less monitored... hidden from official discourses' (p.775). Judy, a 'welfare helper' forerunner of today's TAs, describes boundaries blurring as pupils might help with jobs in a more 'domestic' frame and where the importance of welfare and emotional wellbeing were more recognised than in the classroom (p.776). In Veck's work with 18 LSAs working in a sixth form college, 'exclusionary consequences' of support were partly attributed to fixed approaches to physical space (p. 45) from TAs' own place in the far corner of the staffroom (p.45) to student separation from 'mainstream' space (p. 49). Micheline Mason usefully describes the irony that TAs, themselves feel 'excluded and unrecognised' while being so closely involved in trying to include marginalised young people in mainstream education. Mason's view is that this cannot be understood 'without recognising the struggle that the world is having with the concept of inclusion' (cited by Rustemier and Shaw 2001, p.2).

Given a lack of engagement, then, with inclusion and with power, where TAs and those around them operate by default in the face of multiple and ultimately nebulous rules of engagement, it is unsurprising that various 'default positions' emerge. As Giangreco (2010) points out, 'utilization has advanced... roles have expanded... despite lacking both a theoretically defensible foundation and a substantive evidence base' (p. 341). From a study of around 61 TAs in France, Ebersold (2003) suggests that by default, the assistant can be 'left alone... obliged to frame their work by themselves and ... at the same time as being kept out of the preparatory work' (p.101). Based on a case study of a small English first school and some literature review, Mistry et al. (2004) similarly characterise management of TAs by teachers as inefficient and arbitrary (p.125). Blatchford et al. (2012) state that their 'main point' is that there has been '*ad hoc* drift toward... deployment... with the best of intentions

[but] unintended and unacceptable consequences' (p.8). Similar points are made by Tennant (2001), based on observations of 85 maths lessons in 4 schools and Woolfson and Truswell (2005, p. 64), based on an evaluation study in 3 primary schools..

It is therefore argued here that four main default positions may be discerned in deployment, namely the 'velcro' or dependency-inducing model of TA support, core / periphery positions, TAs operating 'under the radar' of schools and that of 'emotional labour'. Each of these is now discussed in turn.

#### Default position 1: 'Velcro' or dependency- inducing models.

The velcro, or dependency-inducing, model of TA support is widely criticised (Rose 2000, p.195, Tennant 2001, p. 187, Balshaw and Farrell 2002 p.23, Howes 2003, p.151, OfSTED 2004, p. 16, Gerschel 2005, p. 71, Giangreco et al. 2005, p. 29, Peacey 2005, p. 4, Mason 2008, p. 64, Robson and Bailey 2009, pp. 108-109, McGrath, Johns and Mathur 2010, p.5, Glazzard 2011, p.58). Even where researchers indicate that it is rare, it is still reported, as in the case of Watkinson (2003, p. 51). Balshaw (2010) argues that it still persists in many schools despite national guidance (Balshaw, p. 337). In the view of Blatchford et al. (2012), TAs too often provided pupils with answers and seemed to stifle pupil independence' (p.116). In work based on a European Social Fund study, Shah (2007) talked with 30 young people with disabilities, aged 13 – 25 who had experience of mainstream and special schools and colleges (p.427). The young people indicated that they perceived some formal and informal practices designed to support inclusion as barriers which could be characterised as the velcro model (p.435).

Significantly, there is little or no discussion in the literature about why or *how* dependency models come to operate. There is, however, some conflicting evidence that TAs negotiate this area well. Lacey (2001), for example, in a study of 24 schools involved in the inclusion of pupils with severe learning difficulties reports observing TAs providing 'just the right amount' of support (p.157), carefully avoiding being

‘glued’ or presenting a barrier (p.162). Hemmingsson et al. (2003) note ambiguous effects with assistant support both aiding and hindering learning (p. 96). Thus, it would seem useful to further explore and possibly explain how and in what circumstances the velcro model is manifested or avoided.

### Default position 2: core and periphery

The work of TAs can be seen as peripheral and remedial in a model where ‘core’ is implicitly defined as knowledge transfer from teacher to whole class, with other adults ‘peripheral’ (Hancock and Eyres 2004, p.230). The DISS research found that deployment of TAs with small groups or individual pupils while the teacher works with the rest of the class has become the routine and default method of deploying TAs (2012, p. 79). Similarly, discussing the official evaluation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Hancock and Eyres pointed out that evaluations suggested approximately 25% of children did not learn at the ‘expected rate’ and TAs provided ‘catch-ups’ and ‘boosters’, often withdrawing children from class, while teachers concentrated on the ‘others’ (p.230). Their analysis is that these ‘exclusionary’ processes place teachers at the core and TAs (and presumably many children) on the periphery while the appropriateness of a curriculum which leaves 25% of pupils behind goes unquestioned (p. 232). Some participants in Glazzard’s study of one primary school describe the phenomenon as teachers ‘abdicating responsibility’ for lower-achieving learners (p. 59).

The Brown and Harris’ (2010) study of the relationship between expenditure on associate staff and pupil attainment in an opportunistic sample across 83 English secondary schools in England between 2005 and 2009 demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between increases in expenditure on TAs and improved student attainment (p.2) and a stronger and more reliable relationship between increases in actual numbers of TAs and attainment (p. 2). The researchers suggest that the positive benefits for attainment may be for the pupils without SEN, thus ‘allowing the teacher to have more undisturbed interaction with the whole class’ (p.11).

Mansaray (2006) is one of those trying to illuminate the relationship, disputing the core-periphery model which places teachers at the centre, his research suggesting a more complex and liminal picture. Veck (2009) similarly rejects core-periphery models with their implicit conceptualisation of 'good' or 'able' students (p.54) and Hancock et al. (2012) too, refer to HLTAs as 'boundary-crossers', often moving in and out of their own and teachers' roles within a day or week (p. 108). Graves uses the term 'hybrid' (2011, p.15) and in this respect there remains considerable scope for exploration.

While learning support has become a given, the question remains: 'support for what?' (Howes 2003, p.150). Howes (2003) citing Moyles and Suschitzky (1997) suggests a focus on engagement alone may encourage dependency and this is echoed in tension between TA practice which produces short-term change in behaviour and longer term developments in *learning* behaviour (Howes, p.150, Blatchford et al. 2009, p.7). Such tensions and gaps, including the relationship between inclusion and avoiding exclusion which TAs navigate so often, are worthy of further exploration. Giangreco and Doyle (2007), conclude, from their review of international work on TAs, that teaching assistant issues are the *tip of the iceberg* (my italics): 'it is below the surface where the bulk of potential dangers lurk in the form of unresolved issues in general and special education practice ...' (p. 429).

### Default position 3: TAs 'under the radar' of the school

While it is a commonplace that teachers greatly value TAs to the point of feeling they are indispensable (Veck 2009, p. 53), Emam and Farrell (2009), in a case study of 17 pupils on the autistic spectrum also suggest that such ideas imply 'the existence of the TA implicitly meant to teachers that the pupil was not within their range of responsibilities' (p.416). In the same vein, Malipant (2008) refers to year 1 pupil with autism supported by a TA and given 'a wide berth' by other staff (p. 163).



A sense of TAs working unobtrusively to avoid 'all disturbance' is noted by Ebersold (2003, p. 94). In a French survey of 62 teachers, 51 parents and 61 integration assistants, Ebersold generally found teachers and parents much happier with arrangements for children attending mainstream school than were assistants. The TAs were 'very critical', feeling isolated and unprepared. For Ebersold, teachers tended to adopt models which rely on the assistant to 'guarantee' the child's fit to the classroom an integrative model, aligned closely to the teacher agenda. Symes and Humphrey (2011) similarly refer to TAs feeling their role was less to do with pupil work and more to do with pupil focus (p.60) and to keep students 'quiet ... not make a scene' (p.61). Graves (2011) also refers to HLTAs' own workplace professional development as 'clandestine and surreptitious' (p.17). Ebersold (2003) suggests that the assistant's functioning can become 'invisible... anonymous ...' with the TA 'marginalized, deprived of all possibilities to be recognized with ... a marginalization that will bear on the child as well' (p.100). For Ebersold inclusion would depend on 'co-involvement' and co-operation which takes into account 'inter-individual dynamics as well as organisational logics' (p.89).

If TAs remain under the radar, 'potentially useful' for peripheral tasks, in a deficit mode which Howes (2003) argues is the assumed model of Remodelling, the possibility that support staff have 'already developed significant roles at the core of pupil learning (2003, p. 148) is ignored. This 'wastefulness' in missing what TAs know, and the 'subtleties' of their practice (p. 148) is another clear limitation on effective deployment. Thus, as Howes (2003) puts it, accumulated assumptions may well have 'produced inefficient and ineffective practices' (p.147). Intriguingly, there is some evidence that, by contrast, when TAs are engaged on specific interventions there is a positive impact, as for example indicated in work by Roberts and Norwich (2010) and Farrell et al.(in press cited in Symes and Humphrey 2011, p. 58). In the EPPI systematic review of 232 other studies pupil progress was 'more marked when TAs supported pupils in discrete well defined areas of work' such as basic literacy skills (Alborz et al 2009b, p.1).

#### Default position 4: the Affective and Emotional Labour

The argument for a fourth default position is that 'affective schemata' may 'compensate' where explicit teamwork expectations are not established (Thomas 1992, pp. 111-112). This goes well beyond the growth in the pastoral functions of TAs as documented by Edmond and Price (2009), for example in TAs running nurture groups, in mentoring roles and liaising between home and school (p. 304). Most TAs are female (Blatchford et al. 2009, p.1) and a default model of the relationship between TAs and inclusion seems closely linked to gendered assumptions. Work with children can still be portrayed as 'natural' to women (Barkham 2008, p.844). For example, in her study of Early Years classrooms, Barkham notes metaphors of family used by school participants (pp. 848, 851). Recollection of infant dependence on maternal provision is also considered by Robson, Bailey and Mendick (2008) as leading to idealised views of learning support. Their (Learning and Skills funded) research with 27 Further Education (F.E.) learners in nine organisations indicates a tendency to turn to Learning Support Workers (LSWs) rather than teachers for 'protection and containment' (p. 316). Learners tended to express 'deep gratitude' (p. 306) and a 'very, very good feeling' (p. 316), even positioning LSWs as 'rescuers' (p.318).

In schools, Emam and Farrell (2009) see the TA role as stereotyped by teachers as providing an 'element of security' to pupils on the autistic spectrum (p.416). Watkinson (2003) quotes a teacher as stating that TAs provide 'extra cuddle, extra time, extra explanation' (p. 16) and cites (without comment) a TA who, when asked the best thing about the job, replied that it was the 'love and affection' of the children (p. 120). In perhaps an extreme variant, Malipant (2008) takes as a given the idea of learning support assistant as 'largely maternal function... consistent, continuous ... likened to that of the baby needing its mother' (p.165). Her singular and gendered vision is that of an assistant supported and containing the child only if supported by the school as a 'father supports the mother as she hold the infant' (p. 162).

Linking gender assumptions and anomalies in TA pay (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.53 ), as well as the close relations which may be developed with pupils (Mansaray 2006, p. 179, Giangreco and Doyle 2007, p. 436, Clark 2010, p. 775), personal / emotional positioning is of interest. Perhaps inevitably, children may 'open up' more to those providing individual or small group than to teachers, as described by Klaus Wedell (2007), emeritus professor in Education, describing his own experiences as a volunteer after retirement. Similarly, Giangreco and Doyle's review cites several studies in which students with disabilities report perceiving their assistants in parental / friend / protector roles. In a study of Learning Support Workers (LSWs) in F.E., discourse work by Robson and Bailey (2009) identifies the same narratives of foregrounding personal qualities and of being 'positioned as a kind of caring friend' (p. 107). Maliphant (2008) suggests that the 'presence and state of mind' of learning support assistants working with pupils with SEN (and more specifically autism) 'has to resemble that of therapist' in 'attuned mind and continual presence' (p.162).

Closeness is not only described between pupils and TAs but between teachers and TAs. Watkinson (2003) describes teachers talking of 'emotional as well as practical help during inspections' (p. 121) and Bedford et al. (2008, p.18) found that teachers tended to foreground personal attributes when asked about what was required from TAs over the professional skills they saw as being required from teachers. This principle is reinforced by the DISS study where Blatchford et al's interviews with headteachers suggest no overall expectation that new staff need be qualified nor experienced, instead they prioritised the personal qualities of applicants in relation to particular posts (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.52). Researching 17 pupils with ASD in mainstream schools, Emam and Farrell (2009) found in interviews with the TAs involved that they viewed their role in terms of removing barriers to learning and aiding pupils' academic and social involvement. They saw themselves as moderators between school and pupils. However teachers saw the role as providing 'security' to pupils (p.416). Further, Barkham (2008) notes that a TA in her study reports that she always supports the teacher, even if she feels planning has not been wholly effective (p.846). Barkham observes TAs positioning themselves with the children (p. 847),

deliberately surrendering ‘ their position and power, privileging that of the learner *and* the teacher’ (p.846). Watkinson (2003), too, cites ‘case study evidence’ as indicating that TAs interviewed were ‘modest and tend to dismiss their capabilities’ (p.25).

The concept of emotional labour (Hochschild 2003) is of interest. In Hochschild’s sense, emotional labour refers to work which relies on emotional as well as physical / mental contribution so that others feel ‘cared for in a convivial and safe place’, possibly at some cost to the worker (2003, p. 7). There are interesting echoes of this in Smith’s work (2012) on nursing where it was found that ‘continued stereotyping of care’ as work which is ‘natural’ to women keeps it on the margins of medical work (p. 3). Colley (2002) refers to mentors whom she argues may reproduce subordinate groupings through exploited ‘interpersonal’ labour (p. 257). There appears, however, to be no specific development of this idea in research on the work of TAs in the inclusion of school pupils with SEN and thus an opportunity for this study. In this context it is salutary that Shyman’s (2010) study of 100 paraeducators in mainstream and ‘alternative’ schools in the United States found just over 70% of them had at least ‘a notably high level of emotional exhaustion’ (p. 837).

Returning to the pivotal matters of power, influence and control, Slee (2012) argues that inclusive education depends, amongst other features, on the ‘analytic gaze’ which should include consideration of education ‘practices and cultures’ (p.48) as well as structures – it is to this task that the current research aspires to contribute.

### The voice of TAs

Given the view that much official documentation and wider literature relating to TAs is concerned with leadership and management (Bedford et al. 2008 p. 13) and tends to the technician, there is considerable scope for building on the work of researchers who have focussed on the voices of TAs. Certainly the TA perspective is absent from the policy debate (Mansaray 2006, p.183). The use of the word ‘tool’ is commonly used to refer to TAs as in Symes and Humphrey’s (2011) ‘support staff... have become the primary tool in facilitating the inclusion of pupils with special educational

needs' (p. 57). O'Brien and Garner (2001) characterise some research as using the language of 'effective utilisation' of TAs, as if 'reading the instruction manual for a useful household tool' (p. 2) 'about' rather than 'with' or 'by' TAs, their voice unheard (p. 2), a view echoed by Lewis (2003, p. 95), Mansaray (2006, p.173), Barkham (2008, p. 839) and Mackenzie (2011, p.65). This is echoed 'on more than occasion' by TAs taking part in focus groups with Dunne, Goddard and Woolhouse (2008), in their words, 'teachers use you' (p.245). Apparently without irony, Briggs and Cunningham (2009) entitle their book 'Making the Most of *Your* Teaching Assistant' (no italics in original). Veck (2009) reflects on the similar use of the word 'resource', citing a range of literature which refers to TAs as a (valuable or invaluable) resource (p. 53). Veck argues persuasively that this is a 'language of experts and subjects, of those who control and are controlled' and that such language has powerful (potentially exclusionary) effects (p. 53).

O'Brien and Garner's powerful (2001) presentation of TAs' voices in 'story' form seems scarcely to have been built upon. There are exceptions, such as Roaf (2003), but the difficulty persists. Lowe and Pugh (2007) for example, note that TA participants in their research project were unable to present the work at a conference, not being 'allowed' out of school being among the reasons cited (p.27). It is interesting that the DISS team also note that they did 'not include TAs' in their working groups set up to address the implications and recommendations for their research since the aim was to 'develop a dialogue ... with staff with decision-making responsibilities at the classroom and school level' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.120).

At the other end of the spectrum, Dillow (2010) focuses on individual 'stories'. Phenomenological and experiential in nature, her book presents a series of 'ethnographic' and 'auto-ethnographic' portraits of individual career journeys towards TA work and individual responses to employment. However, the material, while compelling, tends to the personal. One TA for example is described as opening a child's artwork so that 'something like glitter ... caught the sun, chasing the dust particles in a sparky spiral, Martha recognised the magic' (p. 42). There is no sustained analysis of issues of power or explanations for the *status quo* although

Sorsby's (2004) action research project with a small group of primary-school TAs in developing their own understanding of their work in relation to social model thinking is promising.

It is central to the current study, however, that 'bi-discoursal' people, such as TAs, who have to master 'contesting or conflicting Discourses', may be well positioned to illuminate such situations, as Gee (2008 p.167) suggests. In her study of 13 TAs with studying at the University at which she is employed, Mackenzie (2011) notes TAs expressing contradictory aspects in their own thinking about inclusion (as for instance in Sikes et al. 2007 and Croll and Moses 2000) and in her own study TAs felt ambivalent about inclusion especially its working in practice and tendency to internal exclusion both within and outside classrooms (p.69). Hancock et al. (2012) argue that the HLTA literature needs 'fine-grain studies... insider accounts from individual HLTAs themselves' as they manage roles and boundaries day-to-day (p.100). There is some evidence that TAs have insights to offer, for example Blatchford et al. point out that the difficulty in balancing TA support, without nurturing dependence, was recognised by far fewer teachers than TAs (2012, p. 89).

The work of Mansaray (2006) is compelling in this area. His 'exploratory analysis' aims to make the 'taken for granted' problematic (p. 173) arguing that TAs' 'perceptions and practices can enrich and unravel the multi-dimensional nature of inclusion and its ironic aspects' (p.184). Mansaray describes his own research as a small-scale qualitative study using observation and semi-structured interviews at two schools, one of which was employing him at the time. Mansaray explicitly foregrounds the perspective and voice of TAs (p.173). Using the concept of liminality, drawn from anthropology, to explore the relationship of 'core and periphery' he suggests a second, critical, version of liminality, to explore a generative process, where entities are 'unfinished, unstable and destabilising' (p. 175). Mansaray's analysis thus highlights the 'boundary work' of TAs, within and beyond schools, involved in 'bridging, mediating and transgressing many of the hierarchical, symbolic, cultural and pedagogic status boundaries ... reproduced within schools' (p. 171). Referring to the work of Menter, Muschamp, Nicholls and Ozga (1997), Mansaray

sees 'taking the perspectives of TAs seriously' as aiding a more critical examination of power relations within schools (Mansaray 2006, p. 175 citing Menter et al. 1997, pp. 20-21), seeking to make the 'taken for granted' problematic. Mansaray's critique of the Workforce Reform agenda is its assumption that 'pedagogic work and roles can be apportioned unproblematically' (p. 173) and TAs' construction within a policy discourse that tends to posit their role as peripheral to teaching and learning' (p. 171).

For Mansaray, challenging the core-periphery model is key to the illuminative possibilities of considering the work of TAs (p.184). He argues that 'in constructing a sense of what TAs do, *the discourse* (my italics) is riddled with the discursive tension of their working practices' (p. 177). In one transcript, for example, Mansaray cites a TA describing how her work was 'like' and 'not like' that of teachers. Mansaray analyses her words as 'she deconstructs, challenges and shows the inadequacy of the core-periphery model'. (p.178). Mansaray's TAs comment on aspects of their role such as the tendency for children to perceive them as 'more on their level' 'than the teacher' (p.178-9) and argues that TAs' work 'shows a dynamic and penetrating understanding of children's experiences of schooling' (p.179). Mansaray argues that we need 'to interrogate the wider policy environment, which constrains both TAs and teachers and renders practices such as withdrawing children from class "normal" rather than problematic' (p.180). It is here that the philosophers of difference contribute.

## **D: Theoretical insight from Foucault and Derrida**

Foucault and Derrida thus have much to contribute to a reading of the literature and to methodology, above all, as their work encourages what Allan (2008) describes as a sense of inclusion as 'a source of interest and intrigue, rather than a problem to be defined and managed' (p.102). This study is based on the premise that TAs have insight to contribute. Allan (2008) uses the analogy of Anzaldúa's description of a 'mestiza' of mixed heritage / culture who develops 'tolerance for contradictions ... ambiguity ... operates in a pluralistic mode ...' (Allan, p. 156 citing Anzaldúa 1987). Anzaldúa sees such individuals living on borderlines as having potential to 'see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities' (1987, p.38), perhaps in the same way as Mansaray's (2006) understanding of liminality in relation to TAs. This research also aspires to such an understanding of the work of TAs - as mestizas.

Despite differences (Milne 2003, p. 212), rivalries and disagreements (Valverde 1999, p. 672, Boothroyd 2005, p. 3), insights from the work of Foucault and Derrida are consistent with the interpretive approach as they foreground the constructed, situated, nature of discourse (Humes and Bryce, p.179). Both also inform the 'micro' focus of this project, contribute to the focus on inclusion and on power and, in turn, align with the use of CDA.

Considering first the 'micro' focus, Derrida is concerned with small 'inconspicuous repetitions that weave the precarious fabric of daily life' (Caputo 1997, p.200), even 'the bits and pieces that tend to drop from sight in the prevailing view of things, listening for the still small voices' of the 'other' (Caputo, p.52). For Foucault, too, (1981) to look at power is to focus on 'local and particular issues' (p.151). His 'microphysics of power' (Foucault 1973a, p.16) where disciplinary power exists and moves through 'capillary form' (1973b, p.40), operates at the micro level through 'dispersion, relays, networks' (1973a, p.4).

Foucault's thinking is also invaluable in considering 'inclusion' since his topics of discipline, medicine and 'madness' resonate with the experience of pupils with 'SEN' (Allan 1999, p.18). Elden (2006) suggests that 'psychiatric power' is at its most



powerful when dealing with 'abnormal' children (p. 52) and Foucault's surveillance mechanisms of 'hierarchical observation', 'normalizing judgements', 'examination' and 'spatialization' are all relevant (Allan 1999, pp. 21- 23). For Foucault, for example, disciplinary power has the double property of 'discarding' individuals to schools for the 'feeble-minded', yet always 'normalizing', 'inventing new recovery systems, always re-establishing the rule'(1973b, p. 54). The 'recovery system' of interest here and always in mind during the analysis, is the deployment of TAs in 'inclusive' mainstream schools.

Reflecting on modern 'marginalization' of 'deviants' against a medieval backdrop (1975a, pp. 43-44), Foucault sees outright exclusion as superseded by 'the inclusion of plague victims' (p.44). 'Plague' towns, carefully divided and scrupulously inspected became not a means of 'driving out individuals but rather of establishing and fixing them, of giving them their own place ... Not rejection but inclusion' (p.48). For Foucault, such discursive power is always more effective than physical force as it 'pacifies' through 'apparent choice' (Shildrick 2005, p. 32). Foucault's writing about those around 'the doctor' (psychiatrist) (1973a, p. 4) is also of interest in relation to TAs. He refers to 'servants' (p.5), appearing to serve the 'patient' as well as intermediary supervisors and the doctor. They assist patients but do so 'in such a way that ... patients' behaviour can be observed from behind, underhand ... instead of ... from above' (p.5).

Derrida's great contribution to work on power and language includes the insight that we are embedded in global and micro networks. Derrida sees these 'pre-suppositions' as 'text' (Caputo 1997, p. 80) and it is in this sense that there is nothing outside the text (Derrida 1967, p. 158), 'nothing that is not caught in a network of differences and references that give a textual structure to what we can know of the world' (Lather 2003, p. 258). The contribution to this current research is to help expose the *status quo* (in this case 'inclusion' or 'TA support') to what is 'other' and possible (Caputo p. 42). This is not just what Derrida calls 'linguisticism'. For example, in organisations, 'hierarchized, institutional spacing ... define in advance the role, the power, and the voice of the individual, something that is embodied in

expressions' like the "main office" or "top floor" (Caputo, p. 104), or, perhaps in this case, words or phrases used by TAs. Derrida's aporias can also illuminate binary oppositions (Burman and Maclure 2005, p. 286), inclusion and exclusion, and, beyond the simple binary, Derrida's *sous rature*, '~~inclusion~~', that which is not inclusion but not 'quite' exclusion.

Commentators note that Derrida is criticised as unnecessarily obscure (Dimitiadis and Kamberlis 2000, p.102, Allan 2008, p.71).<sup>7</sup> There is no pretence here at Derridean scholarship, the writing is extraordinarily difficult. However, the contribution is the impetus to question what any reader 'understands' (Dimitiadis and Kamberelis p. 102). As MacLure (2003) puts it, an approach which offers 'resources for prying apart the institutionalized common sense that naturalizes binary oppositions and the inequalities that they distribute' (p.181).

There is also no shortage of criticism of Foucault. Allan (2008) indeed argues that researchers have to 'hold their nerve' if adopting the analyses of any of the philosophers of difference (p.150). Criticisms of Foucault as pessimistic and denying agency are well-rehearsed. However, while accepting that TAs are influenced by factors beyond their control, this research embraces the idea of TAs as 'co-creators', always retaining the *potential* of agency. Thus, Ball, citing the work of Harker and May (1993) in relation to Bourdieu, argues that 'agency and structure are implicit in each other, rather than being the two poles of a continuum' (Ball, 1994, p.15).

Further criticism of Foucault, that his work does not propose concrete solutions to problems, is freely accepted. Foucault is explicit in not prescribing solutions (1981, p.157), or speaking '*for* others and *above* others' (1981, p.159, original emphasis.) He does however, advocate empirical research (p.151) arguing for collaboration with non-academics in helping to formulate problems (p.150). For example, he suggests real- world 'localized' questions such as 'what is life like in the psychiatric hospital?' or 'What is the job of a nurse?' (1981, p.15). While this study is not exploring the 'job'

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<sup>7</sup> Derrida, in the preamble to *Aporias* (1993) thanks the reader for patience 'in what you are going to endure'! (p. ix). Foucault refers to his own books as 'boring and erudite' (1981, p.32)!

of a TA *per se*, it is the aspiration to collaborate with front line staff and explore their perceptions and experiences that underpins this research.

## **E: Focus of current study on secondary schools and on TAs**

### Focus on Secondary Schools

The main research focus of the proposed study is in the secondary sector because much of the existing literature focusses on primary schools (Klassen 2001, p.121) and because some research indicates unresolved and important issues in the secondary phase.

Primary schools are the subject of Mansaray's (2006) work, which, with its attention to TA voice and to inclusion is of great interest to this study. Bedford et al. (2008) report that 86% of their respondents were from the primary sector, even though free training linked to their research was offered to all primary, special and secondary schools in the county concerned. Sikes et al. (2007) report the comments of six participants, four of whom are from the primary sector. Other key work focussing on primary schools includes Swann and Loxley (1998), Eyres, Cable, Hancock and Turner (2004), Hancock and Eyres (2004), HMI (2002), Mistry et al. (2004), Cremin et al.(2005), Groom and Rose (2005), Woolfson and Truswell (2005), Collins and Simco (2006), Hancock and Collins (2007), Fraser and Meadows (2008), Clark (2010), Glazzard (2011) and Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe (2011). Hancock et al. (2010) look at primary, first and middle schools (p.100).

Clearly, however, there are important contributions in the field of secondary education. Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson's (1999) 3-year, ESRC-funded study of 4 secondary schools locates what they see as the 'endemic nature of resistance' (p.162) to inclusive education in features such as unclear roles and lack of effective planning between classroom 'support' (support teachers or assistants) and the classroom teacher (p.163). Other barriers with resonance for the TA field include the 'vagueness' and elasticity of espoused 'inclusive' principles against the hold of the external policy environment and the resilience of ability grouping (pp.164 -166). Skidmore's (2004) case study of 2 secondary schools with differing cultures and discourses in relation to inclusion also offers illuminating pedagogical modelling. For

example, support for learning may be weighted towards support for the individual or towards support for reforming the curriculum and developing pedagogy (p.113).

These and other issues are both important and unresolved. Barkham (2008) cites Thomas, Butt and Fielding (2004) as finding that while teachers in primary and special schools were consistently positive towards the use of TAs, there were some disparities with the views of secondary teachers, suggesting that the former groups were more familiar with TAs (Barkham, p. 840). Emam and Farrell (2009) found that teachers in secondary were less able to manage pupils with ASD effectively than primary teachers when they were not provided with a TA (p. 416), tending, Emam and Farrell suggest, to 'absolve themselves' from making minor adaptations on the grounds of curricular demands (pp 416-417), possibly due to less time and familiarity with individuals than in primary (p. 417). By comparison with primary, TA deployment is also a relatively new phenomenon in the secondary phase and, given the subject-oriented organisation, there is still the tendency for TAs to support individual pupils, as compared to work with groups in primary schools (as seen in the work of Blatchford et al. 2009, p.2), thus increasing the potential for velcro models to occur with a tendency to focus on task-completion, this tendency also being reflected in the work of Symes and Humphrey (2011) on pupils on the autistic spectrum in four secondary schools. Skidmore's reference to 1960s 'remedial' structures proving a permanent 'ambulance service in a system... prone to accident' thus perhaps still has some resonance (Skidmore 2004 p. 117 citing Golby and Gulliver 1979).

In conclusion, the influence of TAs in the education of pupils in secondary schools may be even more marked than in the primary sector. Blatchford et al's data indicate that while for schools overall, 74% of TA support was for low attaining pupils and those with SEN, in secondary schools the proportion was 87% (2012, p.80) and OfSTED (2004) state that weaknesses in 'making use of the intelligence' that TAs could provide were particularly evident in secondary schools (p. 20).

## Pupils and Teachers

As explained in Chapter 1, this study does not elicit pupil voices, despite the unarguable importance of such consultation in research as a whole. This decision is not taken lightly and, apart from the general principle associated with 'nothing about us without us' some literature raises serious questions about pupils' experiences. Although there are positive evaluations, Hemmingsson, Borell and Gustavsson (2003) suggest that support for the seven pupils with physical disabilities in their Swedish study was 'shaped and dominated' by the adults in the classroom (p.93) but indicate that, when choice was given, pupils preferred a minimum of assistance. Mason (2007) writing from a position as a recipient of support is one of relatively few pupil-perspective pieces of writing and is alarming reading. Her book chapter provides 13 short pen-portraits as a history of her 'helpers'. Some personnel are described as 'great' but others' ministrations are much less welcome, one even allegedly abusive and resulting in serious physical injury<sup>8</sup>.

However, pupils are in one sense at the heart of the current study (as those 'being included') in that in Blatchford et al's terms, there is awareness that they not making the progress which they might and thus 'let down' (p.8), potentially receiving more of what has already not worked (Klassen 2001, p.123). In the same way too, teachers will not be the direct subject of study. This is not neglect of pupils and teachers but simply foregrounding of TAs in response to the need indicated by this literature review.

In conclusion, then, it is important to acknowledge explicitly how partial and interpretive this review must be. As Luker (2008) puts it, the information age has forever ended the era where the canonical 'hard hitters' in a topic area could be summarised in one authoritative review and clear gaps and ways forward identified with a degree of consensus (pp. 76-77). New information appears all the time and this study can only insert what aspires to be an interesting study 'into one or more intellectual conversations going on' (p. 77). In this study, the 'intellectual

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<sup>8</sup> Mason has 'brittle bones'.

conversations' selected are those where it is argued that less is well known, especially in relation to the work of TAs in the context of power and of conceptualisations of inclusion. Given the extensive literature on the subject including large reviews such as those of Alborz et al.(2009 b) and Giangreco et al. and well-controlled long term research such as that of the DISS team (Blatchford et al. 2012), the aim is not to contribute to information so much as to try to contribute to analysis, to ask 'how' and 'why' questions.

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, METHODS**

Research design 'proceeds from an understanding of the question' (Hedges 2012, p. 23) and this research aims to listen to the voices of experienced TAs in order to learn from their perceptions of their work. While this is inevitably filtered through the researcher voice, the aim is to try to better understand TAs who do much of the 'work' of inclusion and to reflect upon possible explanations for their perceptions. In this way, the research aims to contribute to understanding of inclusion of pupils with SEN in secondary schools.

People and what they do are thus the heart of the study, since, as Bloome, Carter, Christian and Shuart-Faris (2005) put it, 'people are always doing something, always involved in some event that is defining them and that they are defining' (p.5). The premise is that TAs are, to a degree, defined by inclusion policy but also embody and enact it in school. The research aims to go beyond what is said to explore possible explanations for the TAs' perceptions, against a background of recurring research findings and perceived research gaps in relation to power and to conceptualisation of inclusion. The subject here is the TAs but the analytical frame or object is perceptions of work in inclusion and SEN. The question always in mind is: 'how is it possible to know that, to think that, to say that...'? (Maclure 2003, p.178, after Threadgold 2000).

In summary, this is a small-scale study, engaging with just eight TAs but aiming for depth in analysis. A pilot study looked at video materials in the public domain in which TAs talk about their work. A simple framework, drawn from the work of others, was developed in order to apply some key ideas from critical discourse analysis (CDA) to this filmed material. Then, in the main research phase, eight experienced TAs were interviewed and the CDA framework was systematically applied to their transcribed words. The analysis was further considered in the light of insights from Foucault, Derrida and, later, as a result of emerging themes in the analysis, Goffman.



This chapter comprises four sections explaining these decisions in sequence, from the general orientation and theoretical basis to the overall research design and, in turn, the methodological approach and specific methods. The chapter ends with an explanation of the processes undertaken during the pilot and main phases of the research, an 'audit trail'.

**Section A** justifies the epistemological orientation.

**Section B** explains the research design and theoretical basis. The insights from Foucault and Derrida, discussed in the previous chapter, are integral to the analysis of data in this study as well as consonant with the research design.

**Section C** explores the methodology and methods for this study.

**Section D** explains the audit trail, summarising the research activities, processes and schedule of decision-making.

## **A: Epistemological Orientation**

The epistemological orientation for this study is unequivocally interpretive. Dichotomous 'quantitative / qualitative' labels seem tired and unhelpful (O' Reilly 2009, p.123), especially when reduced to 'quantitative ... numbers and qualitative ... words' (Blaxter Hughes and Tight 2001 p.196, Alexander 2010, p.22). However, they are so well established in research literature (Thomas 2009, p.79, Robson 2011, p.131) that reference seems essential for the avoidance of doubt. The justification for the orientation, which underpins the subsequent choice of research design, methodology and method, is entirely in terms of fitness for its interpretive, qualitative, purpose. While encompassing a vast range of philosophical and empirical stances, the interpretivist sense of 'no unmediated facts', 'no telling it as it is', no escaping social, historical context and politics (Carr 2006, pp.145 - 146) is fundamental. This is precisely the target of this study: ideas mediated by TAs and a desire to understand strands of their social, historical, political context. From this perspective, Bloome et al. (2005), drawing on Geertz, foreground 'personhood' as integral to understanding of social life since personhood is socially constructed. It is negotiated through interaction and itself structures the social order (p.3).

While adopting a wholly qualitative orientation, there is some (minimal) use of numbers in this study on the grounds of usefulness. Thomas' (2009) criminal investigation analogy is persuasive in that police naturally use different *types* of evidence (p.141). Therefore, a 'fitness for purpose' methodology (Clough and Nutbrown 2002, pp. 17, 19, Rowbottom and Aiston 2006, p.154, Thomas 2009, p.83, Burton and Bartlett 2009, p. 22, Robson 2011, p.28, Thomas 2011, p.28) is adopted throughout.

## **B: Research Design**

Three main aspects of the design are the linked choices of a 'micro' focus, of theoretical insight from Foucault and Derrida, and of CDA. Each is noted here in turn.

### **'Micro' context**

There is substantial support for consideration of the micro context in understanding educational situations. Silverman (2007) describes this sociological tradition, often linked with ethnography, as 'tiny topics', infuriating some people but seeking 'clarity and insight' through attention to detail (p.29). Silverman links this with individual agency and, citing Sacks (1992), argues that people do not so much 'come to terms with' phenomena but 'actively' constitute them (p.30). The aim here is to converse with 'strangers' (Geertz 1973, p.13), in this case TAs, in their own 'natural' setting, and to practise 'extended acquaintances with extremely small matters'(p.21). 'Thick' description thus attempts to capture meanings which people themselves bring to their experiences (Denzin 1989, p. 159), where differentiating between a twitch and a wink as 'a speck of behaviour, a fleck of culture, and – voilà – a gesture!' (Geertz 1973 p.6, after Ryle) far exceeds the thin description of the same event as 'rapid contraction of the ... eyelids' (p. 7).

The original research proposal was over-ambitious and included ethnographic observation. This was abandoned and the decision not to look at the perceptions of teachers and pupils was made for similar reasons: the wish to concentrate available resources on TAs. However, scaling down is not just practical. The aspiration to depth, to 'drill down further' (Thomas 2011, p.4) is the prime reason for the micro focus of the study. The key is always the wish to focus on a human story, aiming to enable the reader 'to smell human breath and hear the sound of voices' (Thomas 2011, p.7).

### Theoretical insight from Foucault and Derrida

As discussed in the last chapter, the work of Foucault and Derrida are consistent with this interpretive approach and also inform the 'micro' focus of this project, contribute to the focus on inclusion and on power and, in turn, underpin the use of CDA. Thus, they are integral to the project methodology.

### Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

Decisions to work within the interpretive paradigm, with a micro focus, draw on ideas from Foucault and Derrida and look in detail at the individual perceptions of some TAs and how they interpret and make sense of their work, all led to the decision to adopt a discourse analysis approach, specifically CDA.

### Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis draws on Saussure's insight that words signify through context and convention rather than inherent meaning (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis 2006, p. 39), even the 'strong' form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis where language determines thought so that if there is no way to express a particular concept in a language then it cannot be used (Sapir 1947 cited in Burr 1995, p.34). From this standpoint, language is not a neutral 'medium' through which ideas are transmitted (Burr, p. 34) but rather words (texts) construct the social world. How people talk shapes what they do, who they are and 'produces and reproduces, moment by moment, our social, political, cultural, and institutional worlds' (Gee 2004, p.48). Therefore, because TA perceptions of their work in inclusion are the focus, discourse analysis seems uniquely relevant.

Critiques of discourse analysis are extensive, including relativism, subjectivity to complex value judgements and the inherent dangers of identifying 'discourses' independent of the speaker and their context (Burr 1995, pp. 173-174). The charge is indisputable! This *is* the standpoint of interpretivism (Coyle 2000, pp.252-3) which embraces, the idea that data are never 'untouched by the researcher's hands'

(Silverman 2007, p. 55). Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that 'dichotomous' thinking about 'real' world and linguistic representations is not 'neutral' and that it is this that discourse analysis is reluctant to take for granted (p.181). Discourse analysis has also been criticised as lacking practical application but practical recommendations for specific action would be wholly inappropriate for the exploratory study at hand. Nevertheless, Wood and Kroger (2000) point out that talk *is* action (p.13). Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) argue that the wish to change the world for the better is equally open to discourse analysts, through casting light upon, spelling out: 'taken-for-granted, commonsense understandings' and rendering them open to discussion and change (p.178).

In the end, the value of discourse analysis depends on standpoint. From a traditional scientific worldview, it is 'deeply suspect' (Burr 1995, p.171) and is certainly marginalised in popular methodology textbooks. Robson (2011) allocates discourse analysis fewer than two pages in his 500, others remain entirely silent (for example, Burton and Bartlett 2009). From a social constructionist view, however, discourse analysis is valid, indeed necessary. The argument here is simply that discourse analysis is appropriate to this project.

### Critical Discourse Analysis

'Discourse analysis' is an umbrella term for a field rather than a single practice (Burr 1995, p.163, Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network 1999, p. 3, Coyle 2000, p. 251, Wood and Kroger 2000, p.18, Taylor 2001, p.5, Philips and Jørgensen 2002, p.1, Dick 2004, p.203, Thomas 2009, p.205). Theoretical emphases differ (Wood and Kroger 2000, p.21, Philips and Jørgensen 2002, p. 21), Wood and Kroger (2000) describing the perspective as 'kaleidoscopic', flexibility a strength rather than insecurity (p.159).

CDA is chosen for its distinguishing elements of critical (C) theory of the social world and its power relations (Robson 2011, p.373), the pivotal place of language / discourse (D) in construction and representation of that world and analytical (A) methodology (Rogers 2004a p. 3). CDA, drawing on social and political as well as

linguistic theory (Fairclough 2003, pp. 2-3), foregrounds ways in which texts 'reproduce power and inequalities' (Peräkylä p. 871). As Fairclough puts it, 'we cannot ... claim that particular features of texts automatically bring about particular changes' but this does not mean there are not effects (p. 8). CDA may, for example, probe how dominance is established (Taylor 2001b pp. 326-327, Peräkylä p. 871) and how power might work, making connections but avoiding determinism and *causal* links (Fairclough 2003, p. 8).

Critiques of CDA include that of imposition of ideology onto data (Rogers 2004a p.14). However, again, this seems no more likely than with any interpretive research (p.15), the very contribution of interpretivism being the subjective nature of knowledge. A second charge is that analysts 'know' what they will find in advance (Rogers 2004a p.14). While potential themes have been identified in the literature, this is not peculiar to CDA work: all research is situated and data selected rather than found. The project could, however, be seen as linguistic analysis 'lite'. Four responses are made. First, *because* I lack background in the discipline, the approach is *ad hoc* and question-driven. CDA is best placed to address the specific research questions. As TA voices are central, discourse analysis is a compelling approach. Further, the relationship of talk to the deeply contested world of 'inclusion' and 'SEN' demands a perspective which can capture the 'critical'. Gee's claim that sedimented layers of meaning can be discerned through discourse analysis, (1992, p.14, 2005 pp. 35-38, 2008, p.95) is persuasive. CDA may discern 'frozen theories' (Gee 2008, p. 97) or 'master myths' (2008, p.111), precisely what is sought in this study.

## **C: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

This section discusses interviewing methods and recruitment of participants alongside ethics, since the aspiration is to 'design in' ethical sensitivity and trustworthiness (Robson 2011, p.154). The specific CDA framework employed is then explained, from development and pilot through to its use in the main research (interview) phase.

### **Interviews**

That this qualitative research is focussed at a micro level, using CDA to explore TA perceptions, led to the decision to interview. The recording required to transcribe accurately for CDA made the use of naturally occurring talk impractical and interviews were 'next best'. There are dangers and limitations here for the espoused interpretive approach and Roulston (2010) points out that our exposure to interviewing in everyday life (from medical appointments to TV programmes) increases the risk of slipping into the view that we just need to ask 'the right questions' to 'extract the information we need to answer our research questions' (p.2). Clearly interviews are criticised on the grounds that what people say may reflect neither what is 'inside their heads' nor what 'happens out there' (Holloway and Jefferson 2000, p.10, Roulston p. 2) and inherent difficulties include researcher effects such as the assumption that the question asked is the one understood (Holloway and Jefferson p. 11). However, Potter and Wetherell's (1987) 'conversational encounter' (p.165), or Marshall's (1994) view of the interview less as a 'means of measuring' participant views but a 'means of exploring the varied ways of making sense or accounting practices' (p.95), is more consistent with the research aims. This study is not an attempt to establish what the state of affairs in TA's school lives *is*, the ethos of the study is interpretive, about TA perceptions. The aim is to listen and reflect. There is no claim about the TAs' talk except that it is what they said.

'Structured' interviews are eschewed here as overly 'directed and unequal' (O' Reilly 2009, p.78). The aspiration was to interview in the sense of participant observation

(Denzin 1989, p.118), becoming closer, through interview, to the social world of the participant, their 'understandings and priorities' (Pole and Morrison, p.35). Semi - structured interviews with TAs avoided a 'straitjacket', with freedom to listen and gently probe but with a focus which kept aims in mind (O'Reilly 2009, p.127, Thomas 2009 p.165, Roulston 2010, p. 14), a 'best of both worlds' approach (Thomas 2011, p. 163). There were pre-set questions to help guard against 'leading' the TAs unduly so that a similar set of questions were asked of everyone. The questions were formulated in areas suggested directly by the research questions and informed both by the literature review and the pilot phase. Questions were emailed to participants 24 hours before their interview, avoiding wholly unanticipated questions out of respect for participants and allowing some advance consideration but avoiding 'preparation' (copy at Appendix 1).

### Participants and ethics

Seven of the main research phase participants were TAs who had completed their degrees at the University where I am employed. All had studied the subject of 'inclusion and special educational needs'. This was not purely 'convenience' sampling as I could easily have contacted other TAs but I sought TAs with whom I was familiar for several reasons. First, it seemed likely that they had a conceptual understanding of inclusion beyond simple 'mainstreaming'. This was important in order to avoid getting 'stuck' on the special / mainstream debate. Second, some degree of familiarity and trust would facilitate talking in some depth and this is important in aspiring to thick description and depth of explanation. Above all, the interest in these TAs was *because* I was 'intimately connected' (Thomas 2011, p. 3) with their work in inclusion. Professional work with TAs kindled my interest from the outset. Clearly there are corresponding limitations however. The TAs are drawn from a limited geographical area (three counties within around 50 miles of the University) and relatively unrepresentative in their qualifications, since only around 15% of all TAs have degrees (Blatchford et al. 2012 pp. 51 - 52). I was also involved in (and inevitably influenced) their own academic development. However, the purpose here



is entirely to look at the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of a small number of TAs, generalisation is not sought<sup>9</sup> (Thomas 2011, p.4).

Nonetheless, all 8 TAs have the same profile as that of ‘most’ in the DISS research and described by Blatchford et al. (2012, p. 56) as typical in the field. They are all white women aged 36 and over. The average age profile of the 8 TA participants here would be a little older than the typical, as is commensurate with their qualifications and experience. The participants had at least 5 years’ TA experience, although all but one had substantially more. The decision not to question the TAs on the specifics of their experience or training was entirely deliberate and part of the ethical position of trying to neutralize the participant / researcher power balance as far as possible and to keep the contact informal rather than ‘quizzing’ participants. However, I was aware of their experience due to prior knowledge. As a bare minimum, for example, a condition of admission to their University Foundation degree course was a minimum of 2 years of TA experience, the course itself then lasts 2 years and all participants except TAs 2, 3 and 8 (who all had extensive experience) had taken the further ‘Honours’ year. I also left a gap of at least several months after graduation before approaching participants.

**Figure 3.1**

	TA 1	TA 2	TA 3	TA 4	TA 5	TA 6	TA 7	TA 8
FdA (Foundation Degree)	■	■	■		■	■	■	■
B.A./ B. Sc. (Hons) 2:1				■	■			
B.A. (Hons) First Class	■					■	■	

### **Participant qualifications and degree classifications**

<sup>9</sup> Since the work of TAs (Bach et al. 2006) and practice in relation to SEN provision in England generally, is extremely variable (Alexander 2010, pp. 134, 135), a ‘representative sample’ would in any case, be elusive for conceptual and practical reasons in small-scale research.

‘Friendliness’ in relationships with research participants signals a need for ethical care. Individuals may also feel ‘obligation’ to a former tutor (Banyard and Hunt 2000, p. 68). Thus, after formal ethical approval was obtained from the University of Birmingham and the University where I am employed, an initial letter outlining the research and inviting TAs to take part was sent from a third-party (not a member of the ethics committee) at the employing University (Appendix 2). All contact details are held centrally by the Academic Support Unit (ASU) at the University and not by tutors. Accordingly, I submitted a list of names of former students to the ASU contact and the letters were sent out with the approval of my line manager, Head of Institute and our Ethics Committee contact. As alumni, these potential participants could have removed their contact details from the database but had not done so. The letter stated that the individual had been selected as one of a number of people (minimising individual pressure) and requesting them to make contact only if they would consider volunteering. The letter stated that while involvement would be valued, no harm to my studies would result if they did not take part. Names of participants approached were chosen simply from module teaching registers. Typically, there are only one or two TAs from secondary schools in each class and each individual who met the criteria was approached, no further selectivity being applied. Ten TAs were approached in all, seven made contact and went on to participate. Another experienced TA approached me as she was a school colleague of one of this group of seven former students. She had studied the equivalent Foundation and Bachelor degrees at another University and joined the group.

While possible feelings of coercion / indebtedness cannot be ruled out in the alumni group, voluntariness and offering to meet at the venue of the participants’ choosing was further emphasized at the point when they contacted me. Thus, access was not attempted ‘once and for all’ but renegotiated (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, p. 63, Miller and Bell 2002, p.53, Denscombe 2003, p.91, O’ Reilly 2009, p. 6) as a way of trying to balance inevitably unequal relationships. All interviews were conducted in suitably quiet rooms and in every case it was possible to sit alongside rather than opposite the participant (see also Figure 3.2 following). Figure 3.3 (also following) shows some contextual information about the schools.

**Figure 3.2**

<b>TA</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Interview venue</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Interview Duration <sup>10</sup></b>
TA 1	School A	University (empty classroom)	11.11.10	42 minutes 19 seconds
TA2	School A	School (meeting room)	16.11.10	35 min 34 secs
TA3	School B	School (meeting room)	10.2.11	30 min 9 secs
TA4	School C	Public Library (half-term)	24.2.11	40 min 51secs
TA5	School D	School (empty classroom)	8.3.11	36 min 30 secs
TA6	School D	School (empty classroom)	8.3.11	34 min 49 secs
TA7	School E	University (empty classroom)	22.3.11	53 min 37 secs
TA8	School B	School (meeting room)	4.7.11	52 min 34 secs

**Interview details: places and times**

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<sup>10</sup> Timing is as digitally recorded but in each case a short initial period of recording was not transcribed as it covers details of graduation / employment and acts as a sound recording check. This usually took around a minute or less but with TA 6 around 2 minutes 30 seconds and with TA 8, 7 minutes.

**Figure 3.3**

<b>School</b>	<b>TA</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>School OfSTED grade</b>	<b>Number on roll<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>Pupils receiving Free School Meals (FSM)</b>	<b>Pupils with SEN and disability</b>
School A	TA 1 and TA 2	Small city in semi-rural county A.	1	<1,500	Below average numbers	Above average numbers
School B	TA 3 and TA 8	Outskirts of large conurbation.	3	<1,000	Below average	Below average but designated provision for 2 categories of disability
School C	TA4	Rural, county A.	2	<1,000	Not known	Below average
School D	TA 5 and TA 6	Large new town, county B.	2	>600	Above average	Well above average
School E	TA7	Medium-sized town, county A.	4 (formerly 3, 2 at time of writing)	>1,000	Above average	Above average

**Context: school data at the time of interview**

<sup>11</sup> Numbers are approximate in order to avoid identifying schools. Data on pupil numbers, FSM and SEN are taken from the schools' OfSTED reports.

Since researchers cannot predict everything about the investigation (Miller and Bell 2002, p. 65), and others cannot therefore be assumed to give truly informed voluntary consent (Silverman 2004, p. 320), the aim was to be as transparent as possible (Duncombe and Jessop 2002, p. 125) with reasonably informed consent. Before each interview, consent was checked verbally and the consent form (appendix 3) completed. The form indicated conditions and guarantees given to participants including the information that the research is part an academic qualification and elements could be published in the future. A summary of the thesis was offered and all participants took up this offer. The sheet re-iterated that non-participation would not adversely affect the research and rights and means of withdrawal were emphasised (BERA 2011, p.6). Shortly after each interview, transcripts were emailed to interviewees along with an explanation of their right to veto the use of the data.

Less tangible ethical dilemmas affect interviewing (Duncombe and Jessop 2002, p. 120). Riddell (1989) cites Finch (1984) as pointing out the ease with which a woman researcher may exploit another (p.84), particularly in unequal status relationships. Krieger (1983) describes the sensitivities of interviewing women whose world view may encourage 'the giving up of the self to others' (p. xii). 'Over - rapport' is also relevant (O' Reilly 2009, p.88). Duncombe and Jessop (2002) highlight the significance of 'outwardly friendly interviews' and 'doing rapport' with just the kinds of emotional labour that women may practise in their work (p. 107). They even describe persevering until interviewees disclosed painful experiences (p.118). While no such disclosures were sought, it is important to be aware of the danger (Duncombe and Jessop, p.121). It was striking that participants, without exception, seemed very keen to take part and were supportive of and enthusiastic about the research. A degree of formality was helpful, as in Benjamin's (2002) strategy of implicit signalling her researcher status by use of her notebook (p.28). I used my MP3 digital voice recorder for the same function. However, I certainly noted the phenomenon which Benjamin describes as 'people... saying the most interesting and unforgettable things when I was putting on my coat to leave' (p. 28)! Only recorded, transcribed and participant-checked data were ever used.

Given the growing understanding that concern for ethics is not a formality and procedures in themselves are insufficient (Thomas 2009, p.151), one ethical benchmark is to balance benefits with potential costs. Soberingly, the research will not produce demonstrable improvement in practice. In addition, pursuit of academic awards has the potential for participants feeling that this is somebody else 'getting a degree on our backs' (Delamont 2002, p.145). However, modest claims for benefit are counter-weighted by minimised 'cost' to participants, the aspiration being for 'non-exploitative and reciprocal' research (Benjamin 2002, p.30), avoiding 'smash and grab' approaches which 'mine' the field (Pole and Morrison 2003, p.22). Key principles included sensitivity and sustained effort to 'tread lightly', taking care with other people's time, in summary, 'respect for others' (BERA 2011 p. 5, Thomas 2009, p.146). Some reciprocity was offered in the study. For example, in one case I was able to inform a participant about a new route into Qualified Teacher Status – which she soon achieved.

#### Recording, transcription and notation

Once interviews were recorded and transcribed, elements of Jefferson's (1984) phonological approach to notation (pp.193 - 4, reproduced in Appendix 4) as recommended by Wood and Kroger (2000, p. 85) were added. Wood and Kroger point out that full phonetic approaches 'exceed the capacities' and resources of most non-linguists, possibly rendering transcripts inaccessible to participants (p. 83). Similarly, Potter and Wetherell suggest detailed timing is often not crucial and impairs readability (p. 166) so this was not attempted. Even so, the process was in line with, if not slower than, Potter and Wetherell's (1987) estimated transcription and notation time of around twenty hours for one hour of talk (p. 166) and transcription and notation were checked and re-checked during analysis. Notation is always arbitrary to some degree, however, (Wood and Kroger 2000, p. 84), emphasis in speech, for example, being, like all else in discourse analysis, a judgement. However, full inter-rater approaches to notation were discounted although a critical friend did sample the transcripts against audio versions and made no suggestions for alterations. The 'raw'

data is accessible in the transcripts (Appendices) as well as the 'cooked' accounts as Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1980, p. 55) put it, even allowing for re-interpretation (p. 60). However, the approach of maintaining a tentative stance to all 'findings' is adopted throughout.

### Towards a CDA framework

There is no universal recipe as to how to proceed in discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987, p. 168, Burr 1995, p. 163, Coyle 2000, p. 257, Rogers 2004a, pp.7-8, Thomas 2009, p.205, Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 4), nor even a typical 'CDA way of collecting data' (Meyer 2001 p.23, Van Dijk 2001 p.98). Specific techniques, too, are described in the literature in differing ways, partly reflecting different theoretical bases but with considerable overlap. Complete analysis is also logically impossible since so many layers of and approaches are possible (Van Dijk, date unclear, cited in Meyer 2001 p. 26), thus approaches to CDA were necessarily selective. Peräkylä argues for letting each method 'do its job in its own way and on its own field and then ... let their results cross-illuminate each other' (p. 881), contributing to a form of triangulation (Meyer 2001, p.30). This seemed helpful since the suggestion of looking at one thing from 'many angles' (Thomas 2011, p. 9) is almost universal. Thus the decision made was to use a simple list of CDA techniques or approaches which are well-supported in the literature and to work through them systematically at the analysis stage. The systematic approach of using the same techniques to interrogate all the texts was important for trustworthiness.

The full list of all approaches considered during analysis was as follows:

- **analysis of topics / macropositions** (Wood and Kroger 2000 p. 109, Van Dijk p.102) **thematic structure** (Rogers 2004b, p. 56) and **general 'analytic orientation'** (Wood and Kroger p.91) and **overall personal reaction**, (Wood and Kroger's does this 'raise hackles?' p.91). This general approach also included conventional identification of themes in common, for example, TAs referring to positive or less positive relationships with teachers, their subject knowledge or personal experiences of schooling and so on.

- **nominalisation** (Fairclough 2003, p.12) or processes represented as entities.
- **personification, metonymy** (Bloor and Bloor 2007, p.72), the use of place name to represent more than location, common examples being Westminster, Washington or Rome.
- **analysis of metaphorical language** (Russell, Mumby, Spafford and Johnston 1988, Wood and Kroger 2000, p.105, Davies and Harré 2001, p. 265, Reisig and Wodak 2001 cited in Meyer 2001 p. 27, Fairclough 2003 p.162, Vadenboncoeur and Torres 2003, p. 88, Rogers 2004b, p. 56, Bloor and Bloor 2007, p.69, Machin and Mayr 2012, p.163). A wide view of 'metaphorical' language rather than pure metaphor was taken, the point being to illuminate ideas rather than textual analysis *per se*.
- **idiom and cliché** (Jäger date unclear cited in Meyer 2001, p. 25) and **slogans and stock phrases** (Bloor and Bloor 2007, p.72).
- **pronoun use** (Eriksson and Aronsson 2005 pp. 719-720 citing Said 1978, Jäger date unclear cited in Meyer 2001 p. 25, Fairclough 2003 p. 149, Rogers 2004b, p. 57, Bloor and Bloor 2007, p.20, Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 84).
- **agent / patient distinction** (Wood and Kroger 2000 p.101).
- **positioning** (Wood and Kroger 2000, p.100, Bloor and Bloor 2007) which might be explicit and or conscious to greater or lesser degrees.
- **footing** (Wood and Kroger 2000 p.102 after Goffman 1981) participants' presentation of themselves as responsible or merely reporting on the experience of others.



- **facework and politeness** (Wood and Kroger 2000, p.48, Rogers 2004b, p. 56, Bloor and Bloor 2007, p. 101, 104) and **repair** (Van Dijk date unclear cited in Meyer p. 26). Given that we all try to protect our 'face' or public self-image and that of others and that much social interaction involves us in 'face - threatening acts' (FTAs), such as expressing disagreement or criticism, facework consists of polite strategies to minimise damage (Wood and Kroger 2000, p. 48).
- **hedges, intensifiers, mitigations and hesitation forms** (Holland et al. p.151, Reisig and Wodak 2001 cited in Meyer 2001 p. 27, Bloor and Bloor p.103, Van Dijk date unclear cited in Meyer p. 26). These forms may link with low social power and gender.
- **turn-taking** (Bloor and Bloor 2007, pp. 105 -106, Van Dijk date unclear cited in Meyer p. 26, Rogers 2004b, p. 56).
- **cohesion devices** (Rogers 2004b, p. 56) such as repetition or flagging up.
- **collocation** (Bloor and Bloor 2007, p. 130) or placing words (and thus, potentially, ideas close together)..
- **prosody** including stress and intonation Van Dijk (date unclear cited in Meyer p. 26).
- **omissions** (Wood and Kroger 2000, p. 93).
- **rhetoric** (Burr 1995 p.156 citing Billig 1990),(Bloor and Bloor 2007, p.67), (Van Dijk date unclear cited in Meyer p. 26).
- **modes of speech, actions, space inhabited, dress and emotions** expressed (Rogers 2004b, p. 57, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2008) .

- **modality** e.g. tense and affinity, (Rogers 2004b, p. 57).
- **linguistic variations** such as *active / passive voice*, third person singular, past tense (Rogers 2004b, p. 57).
- **phonological features** e.g. consonant cluster simplification (Rogers 2004b, p. 57).
- **syntactical level** including copula deletion, multiple negation (Rogers 2004b, p. 57).
- **references** e.g. to medicine (Jäger date unclear cited in Meyer 2001 p. 25).

The application of the framework and schedule of decision-making is discussed in Section D.

Some of the most fruitful approaches included general analytical orientation, metonymy, metaphorical language, pronoun analysis, facework and hedges, intensifiers, mitigations and hesitation forms and each has their own literature in support. For example, analysis of metaphorical language is widely suggested. Russell et al.(1988) point out that metaphors are easily dismissed as familiar everyday speech habits (p.70) but that may be just *how* they ‘function as they do’ (Wood and Kroger 2000, p.105).

Pronoun analysis included Fairclough’s division between ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Fairclough 2003, p. 149). Eriksson and Aronsson (2005) citing the work of Said (1978) describe how people become ‘they’ and ‘other’ through being described as different from ‘us’ (pp. 719-720). Davies and Harré (2001, p. 263) too, claim positioning processes can arise in relation to pronoun grammar. Fairclough (2003) and also suggest exploring ‘nominalization’ (p. 12). Here, instead of processes being represented by clauses or sentences, they become noun-like, with passive and intransitive verbs dominating.

Fairclough argues that nominalization contributes to 'the elision ... and ... mystification and obfuscation – of agency and responsibility' (p.13). 'Inclusion' would be an example.

Rhetoric is seen by Burr (1995, p. 165), citing Billig (1990), as pivotal. Fairclough (2003, pp. 98-99) describes narratives that can have the characteristics of both the 'moral tale' where good things happen if we implement certain policies and the 'cautionary tale' where bad things happen if we do not (p. 99). Structure / agency tension is an important strand with individuals 'fabricated' into the social order, woven into and out of the discourse, simultaneously, enabled and constrained (Foucault 1979, cited in Maclure, 2003 p. 176). Wood and Kroger (2000) also consider the importance of omissions, 'where the critical issue is *that* something is included, not what it is' (p. 93).

### Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

While reliability and validity are 'apple - pie' desirable (Robson 2011, p. 156), there is clearly no way of guaranteeing either (Robson p. 176). Taking reliability first, there are clearly limits to the traditional sense of reliability as replication in this kind of 'real world' research (Burton and Bartlett 2009, p.25, Robson 2011, p. 155). In this sense of 'the test giving the same result next time', reliability appears 'irrelevant' (Thomas 2009, p. 106) in this context.

By comparison, there is no reason to abandon the concept of validity, Hammersley (1998) suggesting there is little justification for research if we do so (p. 66). In the conventional textbook sense of validity, grounded in experiment and testing (Thomas 2009, p.106), the concept is inappropriate for much the same reasons as apply to reliability. This research explores how some TAs perceive their work and how and why they perceive their work as they do. There is no measurement, no hypothesis. Therefore whether a measure truly measures what it purports to measure or gauges the strength of causal relationships is not applicable. However, in the *everyday* language of validity, of rigour, 'plausibility and credibility' (Pole and Morrison 2003,

p.33), Robson's 'trustworthiness' (2011, p.154), this research is defended, otherwise, as Geertz (1973) puts it, how else do you tell a better account from a worse one? (p.16).

Triangulation supports trustworthiness but, again, positivist 'objectivity' (Miller and Fox 2004) is not the understanding. The slant instead is towards highlighting different standpoints rather than constructing a truth (Miller and Fox, p. 36). Denzin (1989) uses the analogy of a kaleidoscope where different methodological perspectives (p.234) offer different configurations of social 'reality' depending on the turn (p. 235). Three types of triangulation identified by Denzin 1988 (in Robson 2011, p. 158) are employed in this study. Triangulation of methodology is supported through the range of CDA features (all in turn derived from a range of authorities) and discussed in supervision and with critical friends in the employing University. There is triangulation of theory through Foucault, Derrida and Goffman, the use of alternative theories against the same data as a source of criticality being suggested by Denzin (1989, p. 240). Triangulation of data includes public domain material and interviews. However, there is no hiding behind this seductive 'comfort' of triangulation where 'if the question has been approached from three sides... the answer is reliable' (Davies and Gannon 2006, p.1).

Trustworthiness is never absolute (Maclure 2003, p.80) and Lather and Denzin and Lincoln argue for re-definition of validity (Lather 1991, p. 66, Denzin and Lincoln 2003 p. 586) away from 'naïve empiricism' towards 'self-reflexivity' (Lather, p.66). Thus, a clear 'audit trail' and schedule of decision-making (in the next section) allows the reader to judge as far as possible how far research has been 'thorough, careful and honest' (Robson 2011, p. 159). However, from the standpoint of this project and thesis, 'there is nothing outside of the text', (Derrida 1967, p.158) and 'texts conspire to erase the traces of their fabrication' at every step, even in the literature selected for this proposal paper, even 'in the kind of *reader*' tacitly summoned (Maclure p. 81, original emphasis). The results are open to observer bias, not generalisable, nor easily open to cross-checking since they are 'personal and subjective' (p.293). On the other hand, data which are 'strong in reality' and 'down to earth' (Adelman et al.

1980, p.59) are exactly what are wanted here and consistent with the research aim and design. Adelman et al. also suggest the possibility that readers may then employ the well-established judgement processes by which they understand other social matters (p.59).

At all times, therefore, the aspiration has been to transparency in methods and all claims for the data and the analysis are appropriately measured. For example, selection of participants has been explained (pp.59-62). No material was discarded, everyone who volunteered to participate was interviewed and all interviews are fully transcribed and presented as appendices. All themes and claims in the data analysis are linked to line references in the transcripts. Incongruities and discrepancies are noted along with points of agreement in chapter 4. All resulting claims are entirely tentative and appropriately measured for this small-scale project.

## **D: Explanation of processes and schedule of decision-making**

This section outlines the steps taken to assure trustworthiness, beginning with the pilot work. This is explained here although it was carried out in the months before interviewing began since the contribution of the pilot was three-fold. Above all, this provided experience of transcription, notation and CDA. The pilot then contributed to the development of the CDA framework to be applied systematically at this main research (interview) phase. Third, exposure to a number of previously unknown TAs led to consideration of possible themes which, like the literature review, helped inform interviews and subsequent analysis.

### **Pilot phase : CDA of video footage in the public domain**

Four films in the public domain were analysed. While complex sensitivities pertain to some public material (Flicker, Haans and Skinner 2004), participants in these films, produced by the DfES and Teachers' TV, will have known that their interviews were televised. A record of consent granted by Teacher's TV is at Appendix 5 and conditions included normal citation and non-commercial use as well as no 'derogatory use' and the principle of treating 'others and their work...with respect' (Teachers' TV, no date, no pagination). The same approach was employed with the DfES material.

The material was chosen for convenience and as a different 'angle' from the main research phase, without researcher effect on the interview and no part in production, as Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe it (p.162). Since participants were selected, presumably for a degree of perceived 'good practice', even pump-priming, the selection hopefully eliminates schools who have not 'thought through' the work of TAs.

Each film includes edited and narrated footage of TAs and their colleagues speaking to camera and off camera (voices heard) and interspersed with school scenes. It is

important to note, therefore, that topics raised emanate not only from TAs themselves. While straying away from TA voices, therefore at this pilot stage, there were some interesting ideas, used in the same way as the literature review, to help illuminate and scope the area of interest. The videos produced by the DfES were:

Video 1: 'Working with Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools' (DfES 2003), transcribed at Appendix 6.

Video 2: 'Working with Teaching Assistants in Secondary Schools' (DfES 2003), transcribed at Appendix 7.

The Teachers TV materials were:

Video 3: 'Secondary TAs: Award Winner, Lathom High School 2006' (Teachers TV 2006a), transcribed at Appendix 8)

Video 4: 'Working with TAs – Secondary - Using TAs Effectively Bexhill High School' (Teachers TV 2006b), transcribed at Appendix 9)

Video 3 was transcribed using the Teachers' TV Visiontext subtitles. Minor alterations were made with repeated listening to the footage. The other videos were all transcribed 'from scratch'. Every category listed above at pp. 65 – 68 was considered for each video at this stage but only those which seemed most fruitful were pursued, as indicated in the following summary of pilot findings, the purpose being to scope and rehearse the approaches.

### **Video 1 (DfES Working with TAs in primary schools)**

The 'omission' category in the CDA framework was interesting here as words that might be expected, such as 'partnership', 'collaboration' 'together' and 'working with' do not appear. While there are many references in the text concerning 'roles' and

remarks such as ‘the Teaching Assistants now have a much clearer idea of what they’re meant to be doing’ (line 203) and ‘there are new needs for the curriculum... they need to know how to work within that framework’ (150), nothing more specific about these roles and frameworks is explained.

Looking at positioning and facework, TAs appeared to position themselves in a relatively dependent way, for example as potentially unable to see ‘the whole picture’ and, laughing (‘h’ in notation): ‘If I did(h)n’t pl(h)an with the tea(h)cher, I wouldn’t know what was going on’ (62). One TA refers to professional development targets as enabling her to become ‘a better person’ (179). There are also references from TAs to the need to ‘help’ or ‘integrate with the teacher’ and receive guidance by getting ‘any sort of feedback ... to be told if you’re doing it right’ (185). Managers, by contrast, never position themselves in a dependent way although one refers to needing ‘more than just yourself, more than just a teacher’ (37). Facework noted may be a function of individual personalities or of an official presentation aiming to ease any teachers’ professional fears about rising numbers of TAs. However, the ideas are interesting to consider.

## **Video 2 (DfES Working with TAs in secondary schools)**

Depending entirely on standpoint, a general reaction to the second film, particularly when rhetoric was considered, could, as Wood and Kroger put it, ‘raise hackles’ (p.91). TAs express pleasure that ‘we’re seen as part of the school not just somebody who stands on the sidelines’ (285) and ‘now we actually get requests to have us in the classroom’ (290-291). Intensifiers are also used here, for example where a teacher refers to a TA ‘actually’ taking a small group for parts of the lesson.’ (43).

Some comments perhaps accentuate the affective in a way that seem less likely to be applied to other staff members. For example, a headteacher, discussing meetings, states ‘I like to think of it as a little bit of quality time for them to sit back and to have a



chat with their line manager' (142 - 143). TAs themselves refer to achieving targets as 'a fabulous ego boost, absolutely fabulous' (232). A teacher's rationale for making sure that a TA should not face a lesson unprepared is that she herself would not like to be in that position (93). Some themes of interest are also discernible, for example intuitive teacher – TA relationships are described by a Deputy Head as 'second nature ... the Teaching Assistant knows what plans are going to be carried out and fits in accordingly' (82 - 83).

### **Video 3 (Teachers TV 'Secondary TAs: Award Winner, Lathom High School)**

Aspects of the framework which seemed useful for this film of Lyn Owen, a winner of the 'Teaching Assistant of the Year' award, included metaphor analysis. Lyn's metaphors include 'digest it slowly' (102), 'totally different language' (102-3) and come at it from different angles (121- 122) together convey a sense of tackling something fairly daunting (but unstated). There is no detailed treatment of what pedagogical support is actually offered. Turning to idiom, Lyn describes herself as 'passionate' (42) and the term is also used twice by others. There is lots of polite facework with Lyn's embarrassment about the award (7) emphasis on not being there to 'force ourselves' or 'push ourselves' (69 - 70) and the explicit 'I'm not sure that I'm a good leader' (92).

Rhetorical repetition is used by others to emphasise Lynn's approach 'she never makes an issue, she never speaks in a loud voice' (65) and the SENCo describes her as reading 'your mind' with communication happening 'by a look ... a wink, or a nod ... she's able to pick up all the nuances' (62 – 63). One pupil describes Lyn as more friend than a teacher (153 - 154) and it could be argued that teachers use terms more typically expected in relation to pupils than colleagues - 'great to have in the classroom' (19 - 20) and 'I find Lyn really conscientious' (21) as well as the more explicit 'willing to learn along with the children' (49). When modelling for the pupils Lyn herself addresses the teacher as 'Miss' (52) as pupils so often do in schools, rather than using the teacher's full name.

Looking broadly at language use, TAs refer explicitly to feelings of embarrassment, isolation and satisfaction (7, 32, and 39) and use the word 'feel' a *further* 6 times 69, 88, 100, 101, 129, 141. Compared to these 9 uses by TAs, other participants use the word 'feel' only once (a pupil, line153). While the main phase interviews did not seek comparison, this is an interesting link with the discussions of emotional labour and affective approaches in Chapter 2.

Subtlety is highlighted, words such as 'unobtrusive' (76) 'quiet' (63, 67, 104), 'care, sensitivity' (77) and 'imperceptibly ... probably the children haven't even noticed' (67 - 68) contributing. All but one of these references are made by others, however, not Lyn herself.

Commitment is emphasised. A teacher describes Lyn working 'above and beyond the call of duty' (21) and the narrator interjects to clarify Lynn's willingness to continue work at home" (105 - 6). A teacher notes that Lyn 'can go away and... produce... differentiated materials' (48). While not necessarily indicating that the teacher assumes differentiation to be a TA responsibility, it is an interesting use of words.

#### **Video 4 (Teachers TV Using TAs Effectively Bexhill High School)**

This film explains practice at a school described as 'nationally recognised' for the 'use' of TAs via a fact - finding visit by the Inclusion Manager from another school. The visitor meets Penny Jones, another winner of the Teaching Assistant of the Year Award.

In overall orientation, the video can be perceived as hortatory, the visitor referring to a risk of becoming 'stagnant' if change is not embraced (line 25) and substantive issues / difficulties are, depending on standpoint, reduced to 'negatives, teething problems' (54). In relation to SEN, it is stated that students have 'greater need' (48) and the perspective can be seen as inclined to the medical model and relatively pessimistic with reference to 'children that you know that won't cope ... you can point

these children out and it may ones they hadn't really spotted or were unsure of, and you know exactly what their needs are' (108-111). Moving around class may lead to 'problems' (113) and looking out for or anticipating problems before they happen is mentioned by two TAs (128-136). Advising on 'preferred learning styles' (148) is mentioned more positively by a teacher but the assumption seems clear from the Assistant Head that classroom teachers 'cannot meet (their) needs' unsupported (160).

The word 'feel' is used by TAs three times and by others three times, although TAs speak far less than others overall. There are several references to positive affect of TAs for teachers, two from the narrator as TAs 'add immeasurably to your teaching day (1 - 2) and make 'the teacher's life much easier (172). Two teachers note that 'they're able to affirm you and you can affirm them' (4 - 5) and 'I don't feel stressed' (with a 'good' TA) (10). TA comments include: 'I just love it' (126) and 'it's really nice' (141).

Considering metaphor, TAs are referred to as being more than an 'extra pair of hands' by the narrator and a TA refers to being a teachers' 'eyes and ears' (131), the subject of the video is described as the 'backbone' (30) of her Department. Pronoun use was of interest. In the main use of 'we' could indicate all school staff though just on occasion there is a 'we / they use as in 'We have to be very flexible with our TAs ... just, y'know move them ...' (50) or 'put them into the areas where they had strengths'. Similarly, a teacher's advice is to 'take them for a drink' (208), rather than go for a drink together.

The word 'actually' is used as an intensifier 13 times. TAs are, for example, described - by TAs - as actually meeting teachers (39), actually respected (68), actually wanting a career (69) and actually knowing if something was going on (128).

There is relatively little detailed information about what TAs actually do during lessons. TAs themselves refer to 'stuff' twice (95, 112) and 'definitely it's a real thing that needs to be done' (114 - 5). The Head TA describes herself as 'sort of' linked to

the English department (94). Planning with teachers and 'delivering' parts of the lesson is discussed as is advising on learning styles (147-8) but when Jakki asks what she would see in class, the response from TAs is about observing, using intuition and 'darting from student to student' (135). Specific pedagogical approaches therefore could be seen as an omission.

## **MAIN RESEARCH PHASE : INTERVIEWS WITH TAs**

Eight TAs were interviewed at the main research phase and the interviews analysed.

### **Analysis of the interviews**

Constant comparison was used with the 8 interviews. The transcription in sufficient detail for CDA helped at the outset so that 'going through data again and again' (Thomas 2011, p.171) was a natural start to the process. What Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe as the cyclical process of moving between coding and analysis continued, categories being refined by analysis (p.167).

Although I completed NVIVO training, I did not use computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Given the limitations of NVIVO against the complexity of CDA (Rogers 2004b, p.57), the crucial importance of 'careful' analysis (Delamont 2002, p.172) and 'intelligent reading' of the data (Thomas 2009, p.207) CAQDAS did not appear to offer any more than, as Thomas (2009) puts it, highlighter pens and a brain (p.207). In inexperienced hands, too, CAQDAS could give a false sense of certainty, almost 'aping' statistical approaches (O' Reilly 2009, p.41).

Each interview was analysed separately against the CDA framework using all the possible categories listed above on pp. 65 - 68 and then these data were compared. Common and discrepant themes were identified and the data re-visited again and again and emerging categories shared and discussed in supervision. I created Word documents in simple table form, a small 'snapshot' fragment of one of the early 'working' Word documents follows at Figure 3.4. As Thomas (2009) puts it in relation to constant comparative method in general, there was 'nothing more complicated than that' (p. 198).

**Figure 3.4**

	TA 1	TA 2	TA 3
Topic: Electronic communication	Yes, upload information to school intranet system (314 - 315, 361 – 365)	Yes, school laptop (191) 'loads of emails' (193)	Yes, school intranet and email (158 - 166).
Topic: Imperceptible / quiet / discretion	Reproduces quiet speech and gesture in describing pupils' approach (102 -111). 'I 'd just walk over to them casually ... not make a big deal of it, say everything OK you know (110 - 111). 'have a quiet word with the teacher' (140) 'just quietly going round' (145). [mimes writing discreetly] (308).	' (56)	'I try to keep still if the teacher's talking ... if I spot someone's talking I can sort of just put my finger on my lips so I can be communicating ... around the room without trying to distract the teacher or the other pupils' (17 - 21). 'Nip' (76 - 77) downstairs to photocopy a section of the book for a pupil or print some notes 'run down ... try and just discreetly, say will that help (.) do it that way' (93 – 94).
Metaphor: steps or movement, physicality		'push' (10, 16) 'gears the lesson to him' (126), 'bump ...up' (396).	'gear lower' (60), falling behind (77), 'thinking on your feet' handling teachers and pupils (178-9), 'rein them in' (289)
Metaphor: surveillance.			'scanning' (8), 'crowd control (43), 'spy in the classroom' (175)

**A fragment of a Word document showing typical 'work in progress' by constant comparison.**

The example (Figure 3.4) shows one of the topic categories which was not pursued (electronic communication), email and intranet being much in evidence for some of the TAs, much less so for others but, either way, did not seem particularly significant to them. By contrast, the topic of 'imperceptibility' seemed universally significant. In the fragment above, features of the discourse (prosody, gesture and modes of speech) echo the topic of 'imperceptibility' as TAs whisper and mime their responses,

drawing the idea to my attention. There is, of course, subjectivity at the heart of this process but also clarity that neither CAQDAS or anything alters this. Additional raters were not sought for the analysis for three main, inter-connected, reasons. First, ethical consent would have to have been sought from participants and potential rapport and openness might thus have been lost. Second, it would be difficult to identify analysts with understanding of both the topic and techniques *and* sufficient time available. Much more fundamentally, however, the research approach aspires to what Marshall (1994) describes as interviewer and participant ‘constructively drawing on’ resources of interest, rather than aiming for ‘uninvolved’ (p.95) interviewing or analysis. Thus, the use of additional raters would simply not be consistent with the research design. Thus, the subjectivity of the analysis is freely acknowledged with the mitigating actions being repeated re-visiting of the data over a period of 18 months and a tentative attitude to the ‘findings’ but, more fundamentally, the argument that this small exploratory study employing some CDA techniques would not gain from aping studies with a wholly different stance.

Some elements of the CDA framework were not used at the final writing-up stage as nothing significant had been identified in those categories (although the original list was kept intact as above at pp. 65-68 with a view to transparency and to possible future use of the list). The categories which produced this ‘nil return’ included turn-taking, modality, linguistic variations, phonological functions and syntactical analysis and references. Finally, word clouds were generated to give a snapshot of the words used, as suggested by Thomas (2011, p. 173). A separate cloud was generated for each interview as well as a composite version. This is not content analysis but simply another way of looking at the interviews for content.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This research explores how experienced Teaching Assistants perceive their work in the inclusion of pupils with 'SEN' in mainstream secondary schools. In Luker's term's that is the 'explanandum', the thing being explained, and this chapter presents an 'explanans', an 'explaining thing' (2008, p.52). Several lenses are employed, aspiring to present findings in a way congruent with the research design and aims, from the perspective that there can be no one 'correct telling' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 8, pp. 279-280). The overall framework for organising the findings is adapted from Smyth (1989) <sup>12</sup> who cites broad origins in Freire (Smyth, p. 5):

- a) Describing: What did the Teaching Assistants say?
- b) Informing : What does this mean?
- c) Confronting: How did it come to be like this?
- d) Reconstruction: How might things be different?

Stages b and c, 'informing' and 'confronting', are the heart of Luker's 'explanans' (2008, p.52). Several theoretical lenses are employed at stage c, insights from Goffman, Foucault and Derrida, essentially to tackle the 'why' question (as highlighted by Luker 2008, p.55).

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<sup>12</sup> Smyth's frame is: Description: what do I do? Information : what does this mean? Confrontation: how did I come to be like this? Reconstruction: how might I do things differently?



## **SECTION A: DESCRIBING:**

### **WHAT DO THE TAs SAY?**

A summary of each TA's contribution is presented in turn, in the chronological order in which the interviews took place. Each contribution is introduced with some illustrative quotations, then ideas expressed explicitly by that TA are presented and, finally, ideas presented as a result of the discourse analysis. The framework for discourse analysis discussed in Chapter 3 was applied for each TA. Caution is paramount in this interpretation of discourse, for example in the analysis of metaphorical language or pronoun use. The analysis is always within the spirit that the analysis of discourse is part of the interpretative process which deepens reflection rather than uncovering 'truth'.

Transcripts for each interview are presented in Appendices 10 – 17. The numbers in brackets in the following sections are references to line numbers in the transcripts.

### What does Teaching Assistant 1 say?

**Teaching Assistant (TA) 1 has a Foundation Degree in Learning Support and a BA Education Studies (First Class Honours). She recently retired from a school rated 'outstanding' by OfSTED (interview transcribed at Appendix 10).**

'my job, to be on the other side of the desk from the teacher and to be part of... the children really, where they are in the class' (92-4).

'school to him [a pupil] was the problem...it is for a lot of children' (466-467).

'On their side... rather than the teacher'... the teacher is the official one... I'm just ... there for them... rather than the lesson itself' (97-99).

'what he had to cope with at home ... having to sit down and start writing English ... stories .... must have been terrible .... He just couldn't do it ... we were forcing him... I still had to go into the lesson with him and he had to do the work and it was a battle' (467-473).

'go- between for pupils and teachers ... not one nor the other. I'm not official' (389-390).

'they don't really know what makes them tick really and we felt that we did' (406-408).

'felt so guilty for such a long time that I'd left these 2 boys that I felt responsible for... you get very attached' (520-521).

'everything's so rigid, they have to follow this rigid curriculum and stick to it, come what may' (479-480).

'pressure and stress... I've got to be able to teach this child ...I felt all that was on me ... made me feel awful actually... Chemistry and Physics, top set... their GCSE' (185-192).

'sheer frustration... more and more responsibilities ... no extra money' (509-513).

'I can't leave it alone it's very rewarding' (526).

### **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 1:**

TA1 works across a range of subjects, including English and 'top set' GCSE Science (transcript line number 160) as well as supporting pupils with Down Syndrome (236) and other individuals (225-6).

References to being a 'go between' are repeated and striking. TA1 positions herself on the 'other side of the desk from the teacher ... part of... the children... (93-4) and 'on their side, rather than the teacher' (97) being 'there for them really rather than the lesson' (99), 'not one nor the other. I'm not official' (389-390). However, TA1 *is* official as an experienced member of staff, an LA employee like anyone else in school.

TA1 emphasises the 'emotional point of view' (88) repeatedly referring to the emotional development and emotional support of pupils (288-289, 394, 400). TA1 also contrasts ideal practice and her own classroom experience (198-199, 215). She states that despite 'talk about modified teaching programmes ... I haven't seen any' (448-9), nor 'modified teaching resources'(481). TA1 advocates greater flexibility in the curriculum offer for children with significant emotional needs, arguing that a less rigid approach should not be a last resort (446- 462). TA1 gives the example of a pupil who moved to a PRU, thriving where 'people were listening... understood his problems' (460). TA1's critique is unequivocal here, 'the school [to this pupil] was the problem. I think it is for a lot of children' (466-467).

It is possible to sense TA1 feeling better informed than the school. For example, she describes pointing out pupil needs to teachers (140, 168, 223, 412- 413, 451) as 'they don't really get to know... what makes them tick... we felt that we did' (406-408).

This is echoed in an account of a recording system instigated but dropped. TA 1 maintained it and the Deputy Headteacher, subsequently requiring information, 'couldn't believe it... said this is fantastic' (335). Changes and 'U' turns are described as 'ridiculous' (370) and 'silly' (373) by TA1, laughing as she relates this (376).

Similarly, while she locates responsibility for differentiation with teachers (158) she reports 'nothing at all' (158, 164) from one teacher and another who had to be alerted to the need (177).

TA1's conceptualisation of 'inclusion' could seem restricted to 'mainstreaming' in the response 'it's good for some, probably for most' (428). However, comments about flexibility indicate deeper thinking and she highlights dilemmas. Given what one boy

'had to cope with at home ... having to sit down and start writing ... stories .... must have been terrible .... He just couldn't do it ... we were forcing him' (468- 471). TA1 'still had to go into the lesson with him' and do 'battle' (472-3) because the 'rigid curriculum' must be followed 'come what may' (480). TA1 also describes a teacher who would 'just ... deliver the lesson' with two pupils struggling (166-7) and refers to sitting at the back, doing most of the work for another. The TA here sees 'no alternative' (229) to this in-class segregation within existing parameters. This and an unhappy experience with a boy with Down syndrome are characterised as 'not inclusion' (231) but perhaps what passes for it.

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA1):**

TA1 uses striking metaphors of 'weaning' pupils off 1:1 support (293) 'mollycoddling' (123) and the feeling that TAs are sometimes required to 'babysit ...so the teacher can get on' (500-501). Like many participant comments, this resonates with the wider literature, for example, Barkham's observation of family metaphors (2008, pp. 848, 851), Robson, Bailey and Mendick's conceptualization of infant dependence on maternal provision (2008, p.316) and Maliphant's idea of learning support as 'maternal function' (2008, p.165). (Further links between participants' ideas and the wider literature are explored in Chapter 5).

Turning to pronoun analysis, TA1 uses the pronoun 'we' to indicate herself and other TAs about 25 times. This compares with use for herself and pupils 7 and for the school / teachers 10 times. TA1 uses 'they' in respect of pupils, around 49 times, teachers 28 and TAs 9 times. On this analysis, TA1 could be positioning herself with other TAs rather than with teachers and her focus appears to be predominantly on pupils, more than teachers. This resonates with her expressed sense of being on the 'other side of the desk from the teacher' (92-97).

Considering 'footing', while TA1 indicates some weaker subject knowledge (190-192), in respect of emotional issues, she is confident 'to discuss with the teacher ... from an emotional point of view' (87-88) and support pupils 'emotionally... on a counselling side' (288-291). There are references to a pupil feeling 'embarrassed'

(169), 'frustrated' (221), 'unhappy' (322) and unable to cope emotionally (468-470). Looking at modes of speech and emotions expressed, TA1 uses the word 'feel' 9 times and 'feeling' once. She refers to feeling 'awful' (190), 'guilty' (458), and 'responsible' (520-1). TA1 uses the word 'emotion' 4 times and refers to pupils' feelings as well as 'pressure and stress on the TA' (185). She refers to lack of differentiation in top set Science, feeling 'I'm there just to support but ... I've got to be able to teach this child' (187). She suggests TAs feel pressure 'to an extent where you did just dread going into the lesson' (197) and later refers to feeling 'very guilty' (458) even after retiring, 'that I'd left these 2 boys' (520-523).

One overall reading would be of a critique of the school offer, especially for pupils whose disabilities were social and emotional. TA1 refers to a video (DfES 2003) she watched at University. The TA refers ironically to it as 'wonderful' and idealised, 'if only' (199-201) with its depiction of discussion and planning with teachers stating 'we didn't have anything like that' (204). It is worth remembering here that the school had an OfSTED 'outstanding' grade and held the Inclusion Quality Mark.

In conclusion, there is a strong sense from TA1 both of a subordinate, even baby-minding role, contrastingly with a strong sense of agency, competence and depth of understanding, despite the perceived shortcomings of classroom offer for some pupils, especially in the emotional sphere. Her sense of 'inclusion' could thus be seen as a commitment to 'softening the blow' (Wedell 2005, p. 5) of mainstream, in her own words, a 'go-between'.

## What does Teaching Assistant 2 say?

TA 2 graduated with Foundation Degree in Learning Support . Her school is rated 'outstanding' by OfSTED (interview transcribed at Appendix 11).

'my job's keeping him up with the work...he's included in, he's doing his coursework he's going to do his GCSEs ... But a lot of the TAs spend a lot of time with the girl with Down Syndrome and um there's another girl we have who's in a wheelchair' ... (239–242).

'extremely severely affected by Down Syndrome ... °absolutely horrendous°, ... he had to be changed, he had to do all of that... he wanted you play with him and stroke his head ... it was sad for him ... a very extreme case' (320–339 ).

'with the very severely disabled ... we have a little girl in school who has Down Syndrome... very, very difficult for everybody concerned I don't feel she was accessing the curriculum, no matter how dumbed down we do it' (199–206).

'You can always, no matter how busy you are if it's important you can find time to pass information on' (183–184).

'she's got 30 odd and she is aware of his problems and she gears the lesson to him but it's usually me that, that if they have a problem, it's me that they call on first ' (125–127).

' often the differentiation is simply explaining it again in a more friendly, friendly way or at a slower pace... the teacher's got to get through the work, it's got to be done, and there's a class of 30 or 25 and um sometimes it can be a bit quick for them and then in which case... I go over it' (143–146).

'they are so used to me that it isn't any difference whether it was Head of English there or not' (104–105).

## **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 2:**

TA2 is employed as a Grade 2 TA within the School's English Department. About half her timetable is allocated to GCSE classes, targeting pupils on the 'C / D borderline'. There is at least one pupil with SEN in most classes. Her answers suggest very positive relationships with pupils, a strong partnership with teachers (84 - 86) and, on the whole, a sense that she feels included in school and content with her status (381-388). On the other hand, TA2 expresses concern about the experience of a small number of pupils achieving significantly below age-related expectations, indicating that this can be 'very, very difficult for everybody' (201-202), at times making her 'feel a failure' (337).

TA2's expression of satisfaction with her role and status within the English Department includes positive relationships with staff and pupils (74-75, 132-136) and positive feedback on an annual pupil survey (87-95). While status and pay were not a focus of this study and never asked about, all interviewees raised it. However, while TA2 does say 'you could get us ... more money' (373) it seems more of a humorous aside compared to some TAs' comments. While there is some ambivalence about recognition by senior management with the words 'sometimes I think they forget... but no, they are very good' (384-385), she also says 'it wasn't just because you were there that [headteacher's first name] spoke to me' (386). It could be argued that TA2 is generous in praising management for simply knowing 'who you are' and being 'interested' (387). On the other hand, there are references to feeling well-supported by teachers who introduce and involve her explicitly in the presence of pupils (75, 77, 85-86).

These positive passages contrast with the sense of troubled experiences relating to the mainstreaming of pupils with severe learning difficulties, specifically two pupils with Down Syndrome (200, 320). This topic is introduced by TA2 rather than arising from researcher questions and she returns to it in some detail (309-315 and onwards). Perhaps this element of the interview is striking because although the TA's own general experience is overwhelmingly positive, elements from the discourse analysis of these comments are notably different.

### Insights from discourse analysis (TA2):

TA2 uses emphasis, whispered speech and altered intonation to express her feelings about a pupil 'extremely severely affected by Down Syndrome ... it was °absolutely horrendous°... very hard ... he wanted you play with him and stroke his head ... it was sad for him ... a very extreme case' (320-339). A 'cold' reading of this text could indicate negative views of disability but longstanding acquaintance with TA2, suggests nothing is further from the truth. TA2 seems genuinely torn between acceptance of the pupil and awareness of the realities of life in this school with which she identifies so strongly. This is summed up in the passage where TA2 apologises in advance 'this is going to sound awful' (211) but pupils treated another girl 'like she was a pet' in Year 7 (213) but now that they have all reached Year 10 'horrible though it sounds, they tend to ignore her'(214). TA2 appreciates the difficulty from both angles as she refers to the pupil having to be escorted into and out of lessons because she is frightened of the school bell. There is humour and understanding in the comment that 'it frightens the life out of me... like... the Titanic' but at the same time the bell is part of the school day.

Aside from references to the pupils with severe learning difficulties as a 'pet' and 'little girl' (200), her language pertains to physical actions, upbeat and perhaps confident as in 'push' for pupils on the C / D borderline (10, 16), TAs who 'bump' the reading ages up (396) and a teacher who 'gears the lesson' to a pupil on the autistic spectrum (126). Descriptions of physical positioning also reinforce a position of confidence. TA 2 tends to sit at the back (3, 34) towards the middle (36) so that she can see 'if any child is having a problem' (55-56) taking care not to sit next to a pupil unless necessary (42-44) but 'walking around, seeing how they're getting on' (57-58). In terms of social positioning, TA2 states that the Department teachers are at pains to ensure that she is perceived with respect by the pupils, introducing her (75) and asking 'do you want to say anything Miss?' (77) or 'what do you think about that Miss?' (85-86).

Confidence in the Department / school may be echoed in TA2's pronoun use. 'We' refers to the combined school team about 23 times compared to references to herself



and other TAs twice, teachers once and pupils 5 times. When TA7 uses 'they' she refers to TAs around 8 times, teachers 4 times, school 7 times but to pupils an overwhelming 53 times. Thus overall the interpretation is of orientation towards pupils but from a firm stance as part of a whole-school team. This may be just a speech pattern variation but chimes with TA2's expressed satisfaction with her standing in Department and school.

A look at footing offers interesting perspectives. TA2 states competence and acceptance as part of the Department. While acknowledging gaps in subject knowledge, 'graphs aren't my forte' (132-133), she feels adept at managing pupils and coursework. They 'are so used to me that it isn't any difference whether it was Head of English there or not' (104-5). This sense of agency is echoed in her mode of speech where TA2 conveys a sense of the dynamic nature of the classroom: 'you need to be doing that next ... how far are you through this coursework, you need that piece signing off, I'll do that, you've done it, I've checked it, you've done it, I'll sign it off for you (269-274).

Overall, It is possible to see TA2 as presenting a demarcation between her work with those pupils with SEN where the job is 'keeping him up with the work ...he's included in, he's doing his coursework he's going to do his GCSEs' (239-241) as compared to others who are relatively isolated (214, 229) with a 'dumbed down' curriculum (205, 250) supported by TAs from the SEN base whose 'work largely 'passes me by' (397). Similarly, TA2 could be seen as distancing herself and the school from the boy whose needs for sensory stimulation were eventually matched to special school provision. The comment that 'I've watched programmes where they did these, I've forgotten, these zones' (335), could be interpreted as a position that such needs could only be met in a very different and specialist environment. This is inclusion' perceived, then, in the 'mainstreaming' sense of being for some and not for others.

### What does 'Teaching Assistant 3' say?

**Teaching Assistant 3 has a Foundation Degree in Learning Support. The school is rated 'satisfactory' by OfSTED (Interview transcribed at Appendix 12).**

'... learning the teacher ... so you know how to handle them as much as you know how to handle the kids' (174–179).

'I could be covering a lesson I would be TA - ing in but without a TA... grossly unfair that it's coming out of the SEN budget' (248–251).

'Some teachers better than others ... some don't know the meaning of the concept' [of differentiation] (118–9).

'never get lesson plans ... teacher will perhaps tell me as soon as I go into the lesson what we're going to be doing but not all of them do ...y'know It's not just my department I think that's a general thing' (105–112).

'I'll nip downstairs and do a photocopy... try and just discreetly, say will that help (.) do it that way' (72– 94).

'you tend to get to know the students after a while how they're gonna operate' (75–76).

'helping that child to become an average pupil ... that they don't stand out more than the others, that they just fit in and they're able to access everything' (209 –215).

'we do say that a lot of students shouldn't be copying off the board but (heh) °doesn't always happen like that' (138–140).

'teachers forget ...where they'll have perhaps a lower ability group that might be hard work and think that's it for a fortnight... some TAs are following that group round all day long' (278– 280).

### **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 3:**

TA3 talks about her work as a Grade 4 TA and HLTA for the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Department with increasing amounts of 'cover' across many other subjects. Some of TA3's GCSE classes have no pupils with SEN, others are almost wholly for pupils with SEN (46, 57). TA3's answers convey a sense of working inconspicuously, 'on the quiet'. She expresses acceptance of the diverse classroom preferences of teachers and students. There is also discussion of stress and disquiet over workforce changes including the effects of the growing extent of 'cover' for teachers.

A reading of the TA as providing differentiation and classroom support almost 'on the quiet', in snatched moments is partly rooted in strategies of enabling students who are more resistant to direct support to overhear advice to others (73-82). However, the sense of discretion also seems to extend to work with teachers. TA3 says she will 'nip' (76-77) downstairs to photocopy notes for pupils, 'run down ... try and just discreetly, say will that help' (93 - 94). In another example, she explains '... perhaps in a quiet lesson ... I'll try... and simplify [an exercise]... and do it that way, but again it's getting it in front of the kids' (126-128).

The orientation is of support for a 'good' school (317) where TAs are 'backed' (297) and the approach to TAs is sophisticated insofar as it is 'non-velcro' (23, 27).

However, three statements imply criticism of teachers. First, TA3 observes that 'we never get lesson plans' (105) so you are 'thinking on your feet' (107), whispering '... not just my department I think that's a general thing' (112). The second criticism is in reference to differentiation where 'some teachers are better at it than others... Some I don't think know the meaning of the concept' (118-119). The third is that 'we do say that a lot of students shouldn't be copying off the board but (heh) ... doesn't always happen like that' (138-140). While there is no suggestion that this is a major feature of teaching, almost all the specific activity the TA reports seems devoted to supporting copying or to textbook exercises (77, 89-93, 96, 126-7, 138-9). TA3 lowers her voice at key points in these comments and critique is reserved and mitigated, for example by the word 'forget' in the comment that 'I think teachers forget ... where they'll have perhaps a lower ability group that might be hard work and think

that's it for a fortnight ... some TAs are following that group round all day long and they don't appreciate... it's harder work' (278-281).

Nevertheless, criticism of management within and beyond school is discernible.

Topics introduced by TA3 include changes in government and local funding (240) and 'cover'. Concerns with covering for absence, which TA3 broadly welcomes (253-254), include lost support for individuals with SEN since she is not replaced as a TA when covering, 'so students are just left' (246, 248). TA3 also questions the training for those 'who've been turned into cover supervisors' (267-268).

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA3):**

TA3's metaphors tend to the physical and active, even with tones of policing or combat in 'scanning' (8), 'hit' (with an RE lesson) (35) 'crowd control' (43), 'barrier' (between pupils) (49) 'gear lower' (60), 'falling behind' (77), 'thinking on your feet' (107), 'spy in the classroom' (175), 'handling teachers and pupils' (178-9) and 'rein them in' (289). While cautious about over-interpretation, this sense of physical struggle could tally with the experience such as that of a 'lower ability group that might be hard work ... following [them] ...round all day' (278-281).

TA3 uses the pronoun 'we' to refer to TAs twice as often (31 times) as to the wider school team (15 times). Perhaps this is her sense of where she belongs. When TA3 uses 'they', she means pupils in an overwhelming majority of cases (44) as compared with teachers (11), TAs (6), or other meanings (8). This also indicates how much time TA3 spent discussing pupils.

As indicated above, criticism is voiced softly and a soft laugh precedes the whispered comment about students copying from the board : '(heh) °doesn't always happen like that°' (138-140). Similarly, looking at modes of speech and emotions, it is very difficult to convey the tone of voice at line 94 when TA3 describes passing printouts to children: 'try and just discreetly, say will that help (.) do it that way'. The tone is almost apologetic with a hint of a sigh, conveying a sense of surreptitious support. However, there are stronger statements too. TA3 describes use of the TA (and by extension, SEN) budget to cover for teacher absences as 'grossly unfair' (250). TA3

also uses language which separates TAs from 'school staff' in that 'you hear a lot more, they [the pupils] ... talk to you the way they wouldn't talk to a member of staff (295), although she also states 'it's better now we're part of it' (291). She states that 'it's the teacher's lesson not my lesson' (123-4) and uses the pronoun 'they' rather than 'we' when talking about the ethos of the school, 'they're quite an accepting school' (224). On the other hand, she twice (verbally) positions herself as a teacher, referring to 'another teacher's lesson' (249) and 'watching other teachers' (269). Ambivalence can also be discerned when TA3 introduces phrases which have become clichés in the field. 'Mums' army' is used twice (176, 239), the first indicating that only some teachers think in these terms, the second indicating that there has been a shift away from this idea. 'Velcro' TA is further emphasised as something that no longer applies (23, 27). Challenges can also be discerned in 'learning the teacher as well as you've got to learn the kids so you know how to handle them as much as you know how to handle the kids' (178-179). Similarly, there is a sense of negotiation and fluidity with pupils, for example, 'I'll perhaps write some of the work for the children but ... it's always a last resort... or I'll say... if you do that, I'll do this so I can at least get them to do some of the work...' (128-134).

Discussing physical positioning, TA3 describes gravitating to the back of class, scanning and moving around (6, 13). In the staffroom, TAs sit 'in that one area...' (183-184). The reference to being needed as 'a barrier in between the other pupils to quieten them down' (49-50) could indicate a disquieting sense of feeling used as a physical barrier. On the other hand, there is a sense of footing as experience with: 'I've been here such a long time, they do seem to trust my judgement' (12-122). However, trust perhaps depends on 'such a long time', and the term 'seem' is interesting in its mitigation or hesitation.

Overall, TA3s' ideas resist summary but perhaps the sense of surreptitious support is foremost, combining expertise and criticality with understanding of and loyalty towards both teachers and pupils.

### What does Teaching Assistant 4 say?

TA 4 has a B.Sc. in Psychology (2:1). Her comments mainly relate to the grade 3 post she recently left, in a school rated 'good' by OfSTED (interview transcribed at Appendix 13).

'you had to get to know the teacher first before you knew what you could and couldn't say' (198–199).

'the Statemented pupil ... when I was in there with him ... all the teachers were really receptive to me ...it was more ...in his absence, then ...felt like actually I'm not really wanted...' (220–228).

'...come in, to support them and go out, off, straight to a next lesson, so didn't always have a lot of time to speak to teachers' (17–19).

'... liaison .. they didn't want to tell the teachers what they were struggling with... whereas I could do that for them' (309–312).

I didn't see much differentiation in the work' (135 –140).

'I felt it was on me to get the teacher onside' (299 – 300).

'constant uphill battle... it was horrendous... causing him a lot of stress you had to step back and let him fail ... it just wasn't right for him '( 417–429).

'work really hard to let [the teachers] know that I'm on their side ...to help them as well... because ... some teachers or some views are you're here for the student ' (306–309).

#### **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 4:**

TA4 talks about her work as a Grade 3 TA primarily employed for 1:1 support of a pupil with Asperger Syndrome whose 'A' level subjects included ICT and Film Studies. TA4 conveys a sense of providing support discreetly (91-95) during a packed school day (166-168) as well as the challenge of supporting a student who was academically 'far behind' (407) his peers. There are variations in the degree to which TA4 herself feels included within the school team, describing both satisfaction (244-246) and self-doubt (296-297).

The topic of discretion is introduced by TA4 and referred to several times. She prefers an audible 'hum' in class, because then she could operate 'without it being really obvious ... it didn't stand out' (91-95). She reports trying not to be in people's way' (54), avoiding 'pinpointing' a pupil in front of the class' (101) and working 'discreetly' (104).

The sense of snatched communication recurs in TA4's comments. She describes coming in 'to support them... off, straight to a next lesson... didn't always have... time to speak to teachers' (17-19) and 'covering in every lesson... going from one lesson to another to another and perhaps only see them at lunchtime or running... passing each other ' (166-168).

TA4 indicates that the pupil she supported 'was far lower than... peers' in achievement and that was 'a struggle' (396), a 'constant uphill battle... very tough... in the end, we almost had to, although it was horrendous... step back and let him fail ... because it just wasn't right for him ' (417-429). TA4 also makes perceptive subject-specific comments about the pupils' difficulties (439-441).

TA4 indicates 3 main factors affecting the extent to which she herself feels included as part of a team. First, she describes feeling 'very much a part of the Inclusion Department ... more... than sometimes the mainstream school' (209-216). Secondly, she describes feeling more 'wanted' when in 1:1 support than in a more general role: 'with the Statemented pupil ... when I was in there with him ... teachers were really receptive to me ...in his absence ...felt like actually I'm not really wanted...' (220-228). The third factor reported is difference in teacher attitude, some teachers valuing 'input and ... support ... with those teachers... you looked forward to those lessons,

... they want my help' but with others you 'question... your job, what you doing there?' (286-297).

TA4 also expresses disquiet about possible reductions in TA support for non-Statemented pupils in the school 'in this current climate ... they're going to slip the net' (348-361) with long-term consequences. In response to the question inviting additional research themes, the topic TA4 raised was how far TAs feel their role is valued (281) and whether that varies according to subjects and / or teachers (282).

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA 4):**

Broadly speaking, metaphorical language tends to observation, diagnosis and surveillance with 'pinpoint' used 3 times (126, 137, 191) together with 'picking things out' (197), 'signposted' (129) and 'slip the net' (361, 368). There is also a sense of physicality and challenge with 'bottom of the ladder' (213), 'spare part' (294) 'constant uphill battle' (417) and 'step back and let him fail' (427).

There is a sense of flux in TA4's positioning. Physically, TA4 'sat next to the student' (36-38) when supporting 1:1. On general class support duty, she tends to 'stand either to the side or to the back of the class' (53-54) during teacher talk and then describes a 'wander round ...help everybody' (58) but will 'gravitate back' towards those in need' (58). At times, the way TA4 strings phrases together reinforces the sense of 'busy-ness', as in the passage: 'you know if they're on the... if you can see they're fully aware, that's like great, I've picked that up, brilliant, you're aware, great' (325-327). Again, the sense of fast-moving surveillance seems palpable.

TA4 uses the pronoun 'we' infrequently, once to refer to herself and other TAs, once to 'Inclusion staff' and twice to herself and teachers. TA4 uses 'we' about 10 more times where it is harder to be sure of the intention, although the likelihood is that this indicates teachers or staff in general. TA4 uses 'they' relatively often, frequently where the third person singular might be used. However, proportions are still of interest. When TA4 uses 'they' she refers to pupils 90 times, 'they' refers to teachers 37 times. From these data, then, pupils seem the key focus, twice as often as the teacher and it is possible that TA4 feels relatively isolated, rather than part of a 'we'.



Perhaps this is someone who feels very much the 'liaison between' (309) and the sense of 'surveillance' could perhaps add to a sense of isolation.

Beyond the physical, there is also evidence of shifting positions. For example, TA4 adopts a position of knowing pupils and being in a position to inform teachers, only lacking knowledge about how much teachers themselves knew as in 'maybe the teacher was aware ... you don't want to tell them things they already know... (319-327). There is also a sense of being valued (197, 218, 285) and successful (244-246). However, on the other hand, there is also a sense of being a 'spare part' 'superfluous' (221) or at the 'bottom of the ladder' (213) being unclear 'why am I here...?' (295).

Broadly, therefore, it is possible to discern a sense of inclusion as something which is actively struggled for as a member of staff and brokered for the pupil in a 'mainstream' (as opposed to resourced 'base' or 'special educational needs' environment) through processes which include surveillance (through 'pinpointing' of needs and checking teacher awareness), fluidity and positive support.

### What does Teaching Assistant 5 say?

TA 5 has a BA (Hons) in Education Studies (2:1), following a Foundation Degree taken at a different institution from the majority of participants. Her school is rated 'good' by OfSTED (interview transcribed at Appendix 14).

'down onto their level ...so you're not looking down on them... they see you as an equal ... Beside them... working with them, not telling them what to do' (30 – 35).

'I don't necessarily feel that we're included in the school, we include the students up here but I sometimes feel we're apart from the school, we're a unit within and apart from the school' (159–160).

'They'll spend time up here just to try and get the learning back into them and to break the cycle' (173–174).

'When the students get older they don't like going to the Learning Support Department' (161 – 162).

'though we say we're inclusive, as a school it's not, because they are isolated up here ...a lot of negativity from teachers... they should be looking at how they can include... rather than I can't... I don't know whether they look at the... activities they're putting on...very easy to say I can't have that child in my class' (202–211).

'...more often than not you go in and you just jump in at the deep end and go for it.' (56 – 58).

'they can't deal with them... can't you go to Learning Support, so there is that kind of... dumping ground ... °We're seen as, we're just, the bit that annoys us°...' (189–192).

'I think there's a very, there's a huge difference, a huge void in knowledge of what we actually do' (298 – 299).

### **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 5:**

TA5 talks about her work as TA, SEN HLTA and Assistant SENCo. Her answers convey a sense of a professional with extensive responsibilities including management of others, pastoral and multi-agency work, and substantive record-keeping. She reports proactive work in seeking out and deploying new resources (95-97, 125), spotting future trends in pupil demographics (214-224) and piloting initiatives (260-266). TA5 critiques the ease with which teachers can exclude pupils from class (211), the relative 'isolation' of pupils in the 'Learning Support' base and perceived lack of teacher understanding of the TA role (295-299). There is a strong and recurring sense of a divide between the Learning Support base and the mainstream school.

TA5 believes that classroom practices could be further interrogated and made more inclusive (201-207). One example is allowing sufficient time for pupils to complete tasks (401-4). Similarly, she suggests that when pupils with handwriting difficulties need to reproduce information (such as lesson objectives), 'all the teacher needs to do is print 30 copies off and stick them in their books ...' (399-402). TA5's Learning Support team work on such solutions themselves, for example introducing portable word-processors to 'keep [pupils] in the mainstream ... instead of having me... write for him, type it up... ↑print it off. It's working really well' (127-132).

TA5 adopts a clear, robust position on inclusion, arguing for closer attention to classroom offer (208), 'the learning... the activities' (208) and 'how they [the teachers] can include him in the class rather than I can't' (206-207). The critique extends to perceived separation of the 'mainstream' and the 'Learning Support' Department within school. She explains that a class in Learning Support is actually 'a mainstream class' as they are 'just the bottom set of the mainstream classes' (4-6). Only 'about 6' pupils are in Learning Support full-time (168-178) so there is fluidity. Nevertheless, in practice, TA5 reports considerable separation with Learning Support even seen as a 'dumping ground' (191), 'a unit within and apart' from the school (160-161). Thus, pupils can be 'isolated' (203) rather than included in the 'mainstream' of the school (202-203). She reports that older pupils may dislike coming to Learning Support, not least due to associated 'stigma' (166-167). TA5's argument for inclusion extends to

the needs of less academically-oriented pupils who 'just want to get a job... we don't cater for them' (444-446).

Nevertheless, there is sympathy for teachers. For example, TA5 comments that teacher colleagues had misunderstood the implications of RAISE<sup>13</sup> online figures, assuming that 'support would come with 'the increasing number of pupils whose 'general level is weaker'. However, TA5 adds 'why should they understand it... they have a lot on their plate' (222-229).

TA5 states that many TAs initially go into their jobs in order to fit around their own children (340) and advocates greater opportunity for subsequent career progression. TA5 states teachers are required for those pupils who need nurture (424) and functional life-skills (426) as well as those who need 'A' level tuition (426). TA5 perceives disparity between others' perceptions of what TAs do and what they actually do (289-292), in particular, being 'looked down at' (301) where others 'just don't see' (313) their knowledge (311) and contribution (313-314).

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA5):**

Metaphors tend to the physical with 'keep an eye on them' (25), 'jump in at the deep end' (55), 'dumping ground' (186), 'a lot on their plate', 'tap into' (410), and 'bombard' (235). 'Too hot to handle' (189) is also used, although after the same phrase is previously used in a researcher question. TA5 refers to 'risk' 4 times (172, 199, 273, 340), for example with 'borderline' pupils on School Action being most at risk (199) of losing support and uses the words 'safe' or 'safety' 5 times (380, 382, 383, 384, 389 ) as in 'you've got to keep everybody safe' (388-389).

TA5 'uses the pronoun 'we' to refer to herself with other TAs, about 87 times. By contrast, she uses 'we' 11 times in relation to school as a whole. 'We' is used to include pupils twice. Strikingly, however, 'we' appears not to be used to clearly indicate a teacher / TA combination. When TA5 uses 'they' she refers to teachers 42 times and to pupils a similar 36 times. 'They' is used for TAs / HLTAs 17 times, for

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<sup>13</sup> Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation (online analysis of pupil and school data).

the school twice and with other meanings 11 times. Thus, on the evidence of use of 'we' and 'they', TA5 positions herself alongside TAs and not with teachers.

In terms of modes of speech, the general impression is of confidence and competence, TA5 answers readily and almost never hesitates or 'stumbles'. She uses specialist terminology such as *DASH*, *lead professional*, *TAC* and *CAF* readily and naturally. She refers to providing INSET for teachers to clarify their understanding of RAISE Online data (219). In the passage 'more often than not you go in and you just jump in at the deep end and go for it' (56-57), the tone of voice is characteristically confident and positive.

In some respects TA5 presents herself as more aware than teachers, for example 'they just don't know exactly what we do and what our role is... some... think we're there to control the behaviour' (332-334). There is a note of incredulity as she reports 'they may say I can't have him in the class any more – out – we have to go with that child ... they don't understand why can't he just go on his own... these children can't be left to wander' (339-342). TA5 roots her competence as rooted in 'years of experience' (303-304), pupil knowledge (313-314) and University CPD (205-206). Academic grounding is deployed in support of her inclusive beliefs, 'University...research up to date' (205-207). Similarly she contrasts TA colleagues as 'probably more recently qualified... compared with teachers who may 'have been qualified a long time and ...if they've not kept up with [CPD]'(102 -104).

Despite criticism, delivery is muted. TA5 uses hesitation forms or incomplete phrases in relation to the standing of the Learning Support Department within school.

Referring to the practice of sending some pupils to Learning Support in an unplanned way and its use as a 'dumping ground' she says, very softly: 'We're seen as, we're just, the bit that annoys us'.. (191-192). Similarly, while University is mentioned as grounding, there is hedging or downplaying as she refers to having done 'University bits' (205).

Overall, TA5's contribution could be characterised as a sense of keeping the pupils safe and effectively supported through strong and highly effective but alternative provision, given a view of a relatively unaccommodating 'mainstream'.

## What does Teaching Assistant 6 say?

TA 6 has a BA in Education (First Class Honours in Special Needs and Inclusion Studies) following an FdA. The school is rated 'good' by OfSTED. (Interview transcription Appendix 15).

'students say can I stay up here with you, I don't wanna go back over there ... please don't send me back' (304 – 307).

'the setting, it is so calm' ... calmer places... somewhere quiet ... calming >, it's very hustle bustle out there'(170–178).

'less formal over here ...we still have rules ... we're probably more consistent in a way... ↓we never tell them off though or issue them with a consequence for not having a pen, we just g(h)ive them one' (336–340).

'those kids, they're so weak, I can't teach them... the Department probably hinders inclusion... you have them, I can't have them, rather than trying to include them in the classroom' (152 –

'one of those in between roles ... caught in the middle sometimes and it's hard to find a place ...' (366 –368).

'lesson plans... 95% of the time, no.'(75–76).

'some just say thanks, miss, for the lesson and never kind of start any kind of conversation with you ' (131–132).

'school's a very strange place ... like a mini - prison for children... they have no choice to come here ... locked up with loads of people they probably wouldn't be with all day' (171–174).

'looking after... special needs students comes back to us...some teachers might not have even looked at an IEP...' (52 – 57).

'it's just very difficult in a secondary school...' (382–383).

'Just not there for the students but also to support the teacher' (143).

'you're kind of hidden... at secondary you need to be...(12 –13).

## **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 6:**

TA6, reflecting on work as an HLTA in the school's Learning Support Base for 4 years and 3 previous years spent in the 'mainstream' school, perceives substantial differences between 'mainstream' and base, such as 'a big lack' of differentiation in mainstream (263-264) and the base providing a calmer ethos (177-178) with benefits for pupil behaviour (169) and pupils asking 'please don't send me back [to the mainstream]' (304-307). TA6 introduces a sense of criticality about the nature of schooling, 'a very strange place to be ... like a mini-prison for children ... they have no choice to come here ... locked up with loads of people they probably wouldn't be with' (171-173). The criticality extends to some teachers' mindset of 'those kids... so weak, I can't teach them... you have them, I can't have them, rather than trying to include them in the classroom' (152-157).

Clear delineation between mainstream and the support base is repeated. Although some pupils stay in the base almost all the time, others move between the two, the organisational stance being that base groups are the 'bottom set' of the mainstream. TA6 negotiates the differences, even welcoming them as 'it's nice seeing both sides of it' (350, 363). In terms of TA roles and tasks, differences relate to the degree of information and control in relation to her work. TA6 compares, for example, rarely seeing lesson plans in the mainstream but [in the base] 'I know exactly what I'm doing for the whole year' (89). Similarly, references to keeping out of the way (11-20) in mainstream or 'running around scribing' to allow pupils to copy from the board (253) contrast with responsibility levels in the base for leading the entry-level English group, entering students for exams, and organising annual reviews.

TA6 empathises with pupil feelings in the discussion of mainstream 'lower ability sets', dominated by 'really challenging children, mainly boys' (303). Given the calm of the Learning Support Unit TA6 asks 'where would you prefer to be?' (303-304). This is the context for the pupils' compelling 'don't send me back' (307).

TA6 gives the impression that as well as separation between 'mainstream' and 'base', there is some separation between teachers and TAs, albeit amicable. While some teachers communicate, 'some just say thanks, Miss, for the lesson and never kind of start any kind of conversation with you' (131-132). TA6 reports that in her

years in the mainstream, 95% of the time she did not see a lesson plan (75-76). In mainstream, TAs could be in 20 different lessons in a week (234-237), then 'off to somewhere else, and off to somewhere else' (86-87).

In some respects, TA6 is critical of teacher pedagogy, for example, with scribing (above) simply to reproduce information from the board she states 'the teacher really hasn't ... taken account of the full scope of learning needs in the classroom' (256-257). Some pupils are seen as a 'nightmare' (169) in the mainstream (168-70) but 'angels up here... totally different children' (168-170). There is a hint of laughter in the (mainstream) notion of giving a pupil a 'consequence' for not having a pen as 'we just g(h)ive them one' (340). However, there is also recognition that the calm (316) and stability of the base permits less formality (336) and negotiation and compromise with pupils (337-342). Although there is frustration at TA and HLTA roles not being fully valued (381-382), this is within a context of the particular constraints on planning and teaching in secondary education (228-237, 383). Furthermore, when TA6 says that 'some teachers might not have even looked at an IEP' (56-57), this is without emphasis or irony. She does not contest the idea that 'teachers expect the knowledge and the understanding of students' to come from support staff (54-56).

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA 6)**

Metaphorical language includes 'hovering' (24), 'fill the teacher in' (144), 'little angels' (169), 'survived' (189), 'keep an eye' (201), 'eye opener' (220), 'picked up' (240), 'fallen behind' (240) and 'mother hens' (317). Broadly, therefore, metaphor use tends to relate to kindly vigilance so that pupils are not left behind.

TA6 uses 'we' to refer to TAs about 34 times. By contrast, she uses 'we' for the combined TA / teacher / school team only 4 times and pupils once. When TA6 uses 'they' she refers to TAs 8 times, to pupils 13 times, teachers 6 times and teachers / school once. Thus, TA6 appears to position herself alongside TAs with her most common point of reference to 'they' as pupils, then other TAs.

TA6's references to physical positions tend to invoke discretion with phrases such as 'near the back, kind of up the corner, just out of the way... hidden' (11-12), 'kind of out



of the way really so you're not (.) in the way' (19-20) 'just hovering near the back really' (24-25), 'stay out of the way' (33-34).

In terms of social positioning, there is evidence of understanding of the demands on teachers in catering for diverse needs, 'it's very hard ...trying to differentiate that much... it's not easy, not easy (275-80). On the other hand, it seems clear, even in the intonation, that TA6 feels that pupils are better managed in Learning Support than elsewhere citing teacher comments she notes' he's ↑always mucking about, silly behaviour, doesn't concentrate on his work yet when he's up here in my English lessons, he's so delightful, works so hard'. The tone here alters from a singsong rhetorical tone at the beginning to emphasis at the end. Perhaps the tone is gently mocking the 'mainstream'.

There is some footing as an objective critical observer of the ironies of 'inclusion' in TA6's 'mini- prison for children (171) and the reporting of the pupils' 'don't send me back' (307). On the other hand, there is hedging when TA6 talks about her position in class in phrases such as 'kind of near the back, kind of up the corner' (11-12), 'kind of out of the way really' (19). The sense of dislocation and busy nature of the main school where TAs may move around to 20 different lessons in a week is reinforced in the refrain 'off to somewhere else, and off to somewhere else' (86-87). Conversely, intensifying emphasis is used to talk about the base 'I really do think it is, a lot of it is the setting, it is so calm' and noticeably slows her speech, commenting 'Teaching assistants, calmer places... people to talk to, somewhere quiet to go, yeah, somewhere calming ›, it's very hustle bustle out there' (177-178).

In summary, the sense of mainstream and base as separate entities is pervasive and the sense of gentle but unmistakeable irony is perhaps reflected in the conversation with a senior member of staff about roles. TA6 reports the manager's question: 'did you know there was these set standards for Teaching Assistants and HLTAs' (218-219). TA6 reports replying in a whispered' °yes I did, yes°'(219).

### What does Teaching Assistant 7 say?

TA 7 has a First Class Honours in Education Studies, having previously completed her Foundation Degree. Her school, previously rated 'satisfactory', was in Special Measures at the time of the interview and now rated 'good'. (Interview transcription Appendix 16).

'somebody was actually reported once for talking while the teacher was talking ... role of the TA ...seems so understated' (394-400).

'unless you love the job... you wouldn't do it ...I wouldn't want to do anything else... I'm stuck (heh) (586 – 589)'.

'there isn't really an opportunity to feed back to teachers unless you do it at the end... you literally go and seek them out which if I had a problem I would go and find them out at lunchtime' (182 – 184).

' when OfSTED's in obviously (heh), lesson plans are very much in abundance' (153–154).

'if the teacher can catch me at the beginning, if there's a couple of minutes while the pupils are coming in (154 – 155).

'I don't see it very much coming from teachers ...I don't think you can expect them to differentiate ...I just think it's quite impossible ... but ... if they do the lesson in such a way that everybody can understand it then that's a good thing. (133 – 138)... ' some teachers do a tiny bit of differentiation ...doesn't happen as often as I think we would like' (143– 145).

' rapport with a certain teacher... takes time to build up... depends on you and them, their personality and yours ...my belief really is that if you can get a good rapport... you work better and you kind of work together if you like...' (355– 358).

## **Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 7:**

TA7 has worked at her school for 11 years, focussing particularly on pupils with learning difficulties and other special educational needs and / or disability across the curriculum. There is repeated identification with and empathy for pupils' feelings (51-52, 94-95, 247-250), as well as reference to her own feelings (18, 449-450, 461-462). TA7 indicates a thought-out strategy for inclusion emphasising pupils' social integration (302-307) and a non -'velcro' approach (15) which is negotiated and sensitive to students' feelings (94-97). Her aspiration is to inclusive lessons presented so 'that everybody can understand' (137).

There is a sense of not always feeling included herself and some dissatisfaction with communication, status and pay, feeling 'stuck', not least through 'love' of the job (586-589). TA7 states that another TA was 'reported once for talking while the teacher was talking' (395-396), adding the '... role of the TA ...seems so understated' (394-400). However, there seems to be more than understatement. There are the practical issues such as 'trying to help a student and then... the whole class has got to be silent... in the middle of explaining something you've got to stop talking' (393-395). There is also unequivocal concern with some management practice. For example, an attempt to suggest a mechanism for feedback from teachers is described as having 'backfired' (451), becoming 'a checking-up exercise... to find fault... totally negative' (451-455). In a similar vein, TA7 recounts promotion to a post which she feels 'was a cost-cutting exercise.... to save... thousands of pounds' (551-552). TA7 says that this was not 'thought out... the job description was horrendous ... disastrous...' (555-567).

Nevertheless, in three statements where there is implied criticism of teaching, this is tempered and restrained. When TA7 comments that she does not see much differentiation 'from teachers' (132) with some 'doing a tiny bit' (142) and 'not as often as... we would like (143-145), she adds 'when you look at what they've got to do for all these lessons... every day...there's so much for them to do ... I don't think you can expect them to differentiate... if there's 4 or 5 pupils with needs in there... it's quite impossible really' (133-137). When TA7 states that she only sees lesson plans

when 'OfSTED's in there is gentle laughter in her voice..(heh)' (153) and the explanation for some inflexibility over exam support includes 'they're so busy' (120) TA7 says she has changed her own approach from being a 'stickler' (282, 299) towards more compromise with pupils (282-300). She also conveys identification with and empathy for pupil feelings in at least 4 examples. Commenting on pupils not asking for help in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves, she reasons that this is 'perfectly acceptable' (75-76). She would not directly ask pupils if they need help 'because they'd probably feel completely useless' (96) approaching this instead in a 'roundabout way' (97). Recalling a pupil who had been 'stropky' (111) when allocated an unfamiliar TA, TA7 comments 'you can understand it' (112). Another student is described as 'awful to me, quite rude but I know it's not personal ... he hates the fact that he needs the help... you have to understand that it must be hard for him... in that position' (248-251) ...'it's not his fault' (262-263). TA7 also highlights the importance of social aspects of inclusion, the possibility of isolation 'with no friends', she feels, 'must be the worst thing ever for these students' (303). Here, TA7 recalls her own 'miserable' Sixth Form experience (312-317).

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA 7):**

TA7 uses the pronoun 'we' to refer to TAs about 33 times. By contrast, she uses 'we' for the combined TA / teacher / school team 8 times and to include pupils once. With the possible exception of one ambiguous use, TA7 appears not to use 'we' to refer to herself and a teacher/s. When TA7 uses 'they' she refers to TAs around 11 times, teachers 13 times, teachers / school 17 times but to pupils 65 times. Thus, pronoun analysis here suggests TA alignment with other TAs and a focus on the pupils rather than alignment with or focus upon teachers / school.

TA7 refers to 'a mix' (25) of physical positioning in class...' near as I can to the ones ... I'm allocated to... not obstructing the teacher and ...get round easily to anyone else that needs me ...I would stay out of the front (35-39). In terms of physical and perhaps social positioning there is reference to sensitivity, for example 'some students don't want you to sit anywhere near them and you just wouldn't ' (46-47).

Perhaps more than most, TA7's footing seems ambivalent. While critique of pedagogy is restrained, there is an explicit 'I came today thinking I won't be negative ...but ... it may come across as being quite negative (412-415). As noted above, however, any critique of teachers' pedagogy is gentle.

Metaphor use tends to images of physical challenge and watchfulness in 'pick up' (a pupil) (4), 'obstacle course' (27), 'glued' (15) 'keep my eye on them' (18), 'catch me' (154), 'keep an eye on them' (159) 'hot' (on uniform etc) (285), 'one step ahead' (90) 'stick with' (121) and 'backfired' (451, 453). The watchfulness and anticipation echoes explicitly expressed ideas such as 'I could see that they're, if everyone's supposed to read something and they're just sort of looking around... I'll come and help them read...' (76-78).

Overall, there is a strong sense of TA7 identifying with pupils, positioning herself alongside them as they are (sometimes) besieged, ready to compromise and change her stance as appropriate.

### What does 'Teaching Assistant 8' say?

TA 8 has a Foundation Degree in Learning Support . The school is rated 'satisfactory' by OfSTED (transcribed at Appendix 17).

'I always call my job the meat between the sandwich' (85).

'empowered to do my job. I don't have to have a degree in the subject... but I do have skills that I've learned, of how to ... intervene with students that are struggling and situations and ...I do feel more able to do my job now than I've ever done ...Most things don't faze me at all (452–458).

'such a good relationship with my Department staff, they are brilliant. If I have any issues I can go and talk to any one of them '(218 –221).

'.depends on how... teacher works ... whether they are a person who comes from the front and works with you or stays there and then you're doing .. I work with both sorts' (62–64).

'The communicator between the two (heh) because they're operating up here somewhere sometimes' [referring to some, notably Physics, teachers] (87 –88).

' as we go in the door, member of staff will say... we're going to be doing ...' (333–346).

'he had... got the differentiated sheet but ... I struggled to find out what the heck he was supposed to do, it was limited but it wasn't clear' (397– 399).

### Ideas expressed by Teaching Assistant 8:

TA8 talks about her work as HLTA in the Science department but also refers to cover in, for example, English (256), Citizenship (462), IT (522) and with an individual student in History (389). TA8 also spends a lot of time in general support within Science lessons for pupils with difficulties, especially of a behavioural nature, explaining (not transcribed) that other TAs provide 1:1 support to those pupils who would not cope with support (such as hers) which could be 'whipped away' for cover. There is a strong sense of TA8 herself feeling included within the Department and school. She reports considerable job satisfaction especially with the department orientation of her role, in terms as strong as 'adore' (113) 'love' (114) and 'prize' (553). Relationships with 'brilliant' teaching staff (219) are 'good' (219) and TA8 feels she can talk to any one of them (219-222).

TA8 clearly states that she is not a teacher (453), does not have the subject knowledge of the teachers (131-134, 453) and cannot do the things they do (225). On the other hand, there is confidence in her own skills in student support. She positions herself as more adept in these matters. For example, when teachers do not always follow school policy by placing key lesson objectives on the board, thus causing weaker pupils to flounder, TA8 states that she is ready to 'fill in the gaps'. This is however 'without causing chaos' and stated *sotto voce* (97-98).

TA8 seems clear that responsibility lies with her to adapt for teachers because she 'realises' that adults 'also think differently so I have to work very hard in those lessons to be the link' between teacher and students' (81-82). Here TA8 simultaneously positions herself as the one who must adjust and do the running but also as more capable in other ways than the (male) physics teachers who are portrayed as less able to communicate (76). The gendered statement is linked even to the point of disability, 'I'm not going to say 'autism'' but again the thrust of the remark is whispered (80). (TA8 remarked that this interview section might need to be edited (69) but was happy with the completed transcript).

Though TA8 is very quietly spoken and relates some difficult situations, there are striking statements of confidence such as feeling 'empowered... I don't have to have a degree in the subject, I'm not the teacher but I do have skills that I've learned, of

how to ... intervene with students that are struggling and situations and .. things don't faze me' (453-459). TA8 uses humour and gentle irony, again implying confidence and security, for example if students are 'chatting too much ...I have to remind them that I might have to move them because I care very much about their work in a l(h)oving kind of way' (50-51). Her reference to 'desperate literacy needs' in a group which are hard to meet because any move away from a particular pupil results in him 'hanging out the window or [making] random noises (319-320) sound challenging but are relayed in a wholly matter-of-fact manner. The same equanimity seems to be extended towards teachers as TA8 states that some physicists 'tend not to include you ... not to communicate' (77) compared with chemists and biologists.

TA8 refers to strategies which are helpful to pupils. These include (say) 3 bullet points providing a frame that highlights a requirement to write 3 points (93), tutoring in specialist subject vocabulary (137-139) and encouraging independence (160).

In response to the invitation to raise additional questions for the research, TA8's concerns are government moves towards academisation<sup>14</sup> of schools (489) and job insecurity (515-518).

### **Insights from discourse analysis (TA 8):**

After the transcribed interview, TA8 said that she was aware her work involves a lot of observation of pupils. She smiled as she recalled that on public transport, she finds herself tracking the conversations of fellow passengers, 'I can't switch my ears off' (296-297). During the transcribed interviews, TA8 also uses a good number of metaphors and / or vivid language which tends to be lively, almost pugilistic: 'cross swords', 'backfires', 'ballistic', 'broken that wall down', 'kick off'. Other idiom includes a [pupil] 'caught bang to rights' (530) and the pastoral approach not being 'rocket science' (536). This could all seem at odds with the quietly-spoken demeanour of TA8 but perhaps the directness and humour link to her confidence and speaks of her effectiveness and active engagement. The phrase 'struggle' for inclusion comes to mind as TA8 seems to interpret this in a very direct way.

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of interview, growing numbers of schools were converting to academies and TA 8 indicates her sense of unease about possible implications for TA employment.



TA8 uses 'we' as a pronoun to include pupils 10 times. TA8 uses 'we' for herself and other TAs about 13 times and for herself and teachers 15 times. 27 'we' references are to the department / school team. Twice 'we' indicates TA8 as part of a class team. Thus 'we' overwhelmingly refers to teachers/department and school around 42 times as compared to 13 times for TAs. When TA8 uses 'they' she refers to TAs around 6 times and to refer to teachers or Department staff (more or less interchangeably) 15 times. 'They' is used in other ways or ambiguously 10 times. 'They' however, refers to pupils 45 times.

In terms of agent / patient distinction, TA8 appears to use the word 'I' quite often and there is a sense of taking responsibility. When asked, for example, about the close support of an individual pupil, 'that's your particular role there?' TA8 replies: 'That's the role I have adopted' (18-19). Similarly, TA8 refers to adopting 'a mix' (25) of physical positions in class according to context. She links physical positioning to a deeper sense of positioning as she differentiates between teachers, 'whether they are a person who comes from the front and works with you or stays there and then you're doing... I work with both sorts' (62-64)

Fluidity in relationships may also be glimpsed in TA8's use of the word 'staff'. TA8 twice refers to 'staff' (26, 344) in a general way which implicitly or explicitly includes TAs but on the other 11 occasions when she uses the word, the context indicates that 'staff' means the teachers and therefore could imply that TAs are not 'staff' (132, 132, 218, 272, 335, 336, 341, 345, 435, 440, 542). As ever, this could be simply an individual speech pattern but is interesting.

When explaining that despite the 'rule' (95) that learning objectives should be displayed and that students 'especially weaker ones' (97) prefer this consistency, TA8 lowers her voice, whispering 'so I try and, y', know fill in the gaps where I can without causing chaos' (98-99). There is no 'blame' for teachers in not providing lesson plans; the phrasing is neutral or passive as in 'Lesson plans, they are supposed to be there' (342), responsibility almost lying with the lesson plans themselves. Typically, there is gentle humour in TA8's words: recounting a lesson involving a stuffed bird 'the kids didn't scream this time' (348) and an incident where she had tried to sharpen a propelling pencil (616) and 'played up' the joke as 'you've got to have a bit of those moments if you can' (622).

## **SECTION B INFORMING: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

This section moves from what TAs said to what this might mean about this small number of TAs, through identifying key themes. From the interpretivist standpoint, ‘situations cannot be fractured into variables’ (Thomas 2011, p.171). Instead, the aim is to study meanings the participants construct ‘in order to understand the social world’ (p. 171).

### *1. Variety of work and subjects.*

All participants report variety. There is change over time (TA6 moving from ‘mainstream’ into the support base and TAs 2, 3 and 8 into subject deployment) as well as *ad hoc* change (TAs 3 and 8 covering subjects outside their specialisms or 1:1 support). The table below shows subjects mentioned and almost certainly underestimates the range of subjects supported. TA7, for example, reports support across the curriculum (372), except MFL. Work includes GCSE level for all TAs and ‘A’ level for TA 4.

	TA 1	TA 2	TA 3	TA 4	TA 5	TA 6	TA 7	TA 8
Biology	■							■
Chemistry	■							■
Citizenship								■
D and T							■	
English	■	■			■	■		■
Film				■				
Geography				■				
History						■		■
ICT				■				■
Maths	■			■	■	■		
MFL			■					
Physics	■							■
R.E.			■					

There is also a sense of fluidity and negotiation over time, as TAs 7 and 8, in particular, report changes in approach. TA7 describes becoming less of a 'stickler' (281), more open to 'leeway' for pupils and TA8 becoming less driven to be active in the classroom and more open to watchful waiting (212-13).

## 2. Perception of sensitivities for students.

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Participants speak with one voice on this topic. TA3 refers to pupils reluctant to have help (73), who, as TA7 points out, 'don't put their hand up ... drawing attention to themselves' (74). Therefore TAs report 'walking around (TA2: 58), 'scanning' (TA: 20) for signs of difficulty (TA7: 76-77). Circulating and observing (TA5: 27), 'not making 'a big deal of it' (TA1:110) or 'without it being really obvious (TA4: 90-91), in 'a roundabout way' (TA7: 96) seem universal. TA7 would not say 'do you need any help?' because 'they'd probably feel completely useless' (95). TA8 notes that a diagnostic approach is necessary as roots of difficulty vary (44-50). Most refer to pupil choice, as in TA4's 'dialogue' (94) and TA8's 'conversation' (45) with pupils and TA2's 'would you like me to... explain it a bit more, would you like me to show you...' (112-113). TA3's strategies include ensuring pupils overhear advice (80-82). TA6 stresses that much depends on the individual 'knowing that child' (45).

## 3. Discretion in TA approach.

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■	■	■	■		■	■	■

All participants except TA5 talk about discreet, even imperceptible, work and / or indicate this in their manner of speech. TA1, for example, mentions 'a quiet word' (140) and reproduces quiet speech and gesture (102-111). TA3 will 'nip' (76-77) downstairs to print out notes for a child 'run down ... try and just discreetly, say will that help (.)' (93-94). As TA6 points out 'you're... hidden... at secondary you need to be... students are older... don't want you right there' (TA6 12-16). Discretion is actively created by TAs who wait for the cover of 'chatter ... talk to them without it

being really obvious' (TA4: 90) or snatch time 'in a quiet lesson' to work on differentiation of a written exercise '... but again it's getting it in front of the kids' (TA3:125-128). This sense of subterfuge is understated but it is striking that two TAs relate TAs being told off 'for talking while the teacher was talking' (TA7: 394-400, TA8: 447-448).

#### 4. TA: little or no sight of lesson plans

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
		■		■	■	■	■

TAs 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 all state that they never or rarely see lesson plans (TA3: 105, TA5: 56-58, TA6: 75-76, TA7:152, TA8: 325). This might be underestimated as this only became an explicit question as the pattern emerged. TA1 refers to a DfES video where 'TAs are involved in the planning ... we didn't have anything like that, nothing' (201-204). Some TAs state that lack of access to planning prevents useful materials being brought along (TA3: 111, TA6: 82) and is not 'satisfactory' (TA7: 159). Extensive classroom experience and faculty deployment compensate (TA3: 108, TA5: 48-50, TA8:328) but this is 'tough' for newer staff (TA8:328-333).

#### 5. Communication 'on the hoof'

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
		■				■	■

In place of systematic access to plans, communication on the hoof is the default position in a busy day. Typically, this takes place in doorways or as pupils arrive (TA3: 106, TA7: 154-155). As TA8 puts it, 'as we go in the door... staff will say... we're going to be doing, it's the plant circus... we've just done invertebrates...' (344-346). TA4 says that the teacher would simply 'give me the nod as to who would need the support' (57).

## 6. Limited differentiation by teachers.

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■		■	■		■	■	

TAs 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7 all indicate that, in their eyes, teacher differentiation for pupils with 'SEN' is at best very variable and generally very limited.

'Nothing. She would just... deliver the lesson' (TA1: 166).

'a big lack in mainstream, of differentiating for different learning needs' (TA 6: 263 - 264).

'there wasn't always that much differentiation' (TA4: 136).

'some teachers are better at it than others... Some I don't think know the meaning of the concept' (TA 3: 118 - 119).

'he had already got the differentiated sheet but ... I struggled to find out what the heck he was supposed to do, it was limited but it wasn't clear' (TA 8: 397 - 399).

'I think some teachers do a tiny bit of differentiation' (TA7: 141 - 142).

There is interesting mitigation from TA7, 'I don't think you can expect them to differentiate ...I just think it's quite impossible'(134–136). TAs 2, 5 and 8 seem to locate differentiation as a TA role.

'often the differentiation is simply explaining... in a more ... friendly way... slower pace... the teacher's got to get through the work... sometimes it can be a bit quick for them and then... I go over it...' (TA 2: 143 - 146).

'a lot of [teachers]... do differentiate to most of you, some of you, all of you' (76 – 77)  
[But] 'HLTAs... differentiate the work'  
[further] (TA 5: 48).

[After setting] 'some ... struggle even at that level so you... draw diagrams, go over what the words mean ... work an example ... do whatever you need to do' (TA 8: 149 - 152).

*7: Initiative for communication resting with TAs.*

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■				■	■	■	

Broadly, initiative is perceived to lie with TAs. TA5 is clear that 'It's down to TAs... we bombard them with ... information... very rare a teacher will come to see us' (235-236). TA1 describes reporting after lessons (324-325) and uploading information electronically (314-315, 361-365). TA4 reports verbal (albeit hurried) 'mention...to the teacher ....sometimes... written notes' (TA4:160-169) and TA6 'at the end of the lesson ... but ...very much dependent on the teacher ...and your relationship'. (132-137). TA7 reports 'there isn't really an opportunity to feed back... unless you literally go and seek them out ... at lunchtime' (182 -184). As TA6 puts it: 'some just say thanks, Miss, for the lesson and never kind of start any kind of conversation with you... if you felt that a child was doing particularly well or struggling... I would always approach the teacher... because I've felt that that was my role' (TA6: 131-141). TAs 2, 3 and 8, however are more confident in institutional systems for feedback 'talking to each other' (TA2: 165) and a range of meetings, email and 'free' periods timed to coincide with senior Department staff (TA2: 168-170). TA3 also refers to email and live electronic reporting (151-163). TA5's comments are from a different stance and within a Learning Support Base the premise is of 'we write the... IEPs up here... it's accessible to all staff.... not averse to putting an email round' to all staff' (TA5: 111-126), thus taking control, at least in SEN-related matters.

*8: Centrality of relationship with teachers*

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
		■	■		■	■	■

Several TAs convey a sense that communication and collaboration is dependent on relationships and that this is personal and subject to teacher disposition rather than a matter of professional routine or school systems.

‘... [communication is] very much dependent on the teacher... and your relationship with the teacher’ (TA 6: 136 – 137).

‘...depends on how the class teacher works ... whether they are a person who comes from the front and works with you or stays there .. I work with both sorts’ (TA 8: 62 - 64).

‘good rapport with a certain teacher... takes time to build up... depends on you and them, their personality and yours ... if you can get a good rapport with that teacher, then they will, you work better and you kind of work together if you like...’ (TA 7: 355 - 358).

TAs, however, report needing to actively manage these relationships:

‘Some teachers... really like the input ... very much dependent on the person... you had to get to know the teacher first before you knew what you could and couldn’t say. I always... ask them... how involved they wanted them me to be... otherwise some were a bit stand offish’ (TA 4: 183 - 200).

‘learning the teacher as well as you’ve got to learn the kids so you know how to handle them as much as you know how to handle the kids’ (TA 3: 177 – 179).

#### 9. Sense of TA standard of inclusive practice not met by teachers

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■		■		■	■	■	■

A number of comments from TAs indicate a perception that teachers do not always meet their expected standard of inclusive practice. TA6 feels that sometimes the ‘teacher really hasn’t kind of taken account of the full scope of learning needs in the classroom’ (TA6: 256-257). TAs also comment on:

- *Differentiation*: as noted in relation to point 6.

- *Copying from the board*: ‘we do say that a lot of students shouldn’t be copying off the board but (heh) ‘doesn’t always happen like that’.’ (TA3: 138-140).
- *Lesson objectives*: ‘although there’s a rule to put up the learning objectives sometimes they might not do that ...I try and... fill in the gaps ‘ (TA8: 94-98).

#### 10. Knowing the pupils

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■		■		■	■		■

TA1 states that TAs get to know pupils ‘on a 1:1 basis ... teachers... can’t do that can they, because they are there to teach and they haven’t the time’ (260-262). She feels ‘they don’t really know what makes them tick really and we felt that we did’ (405-408), ‘you tend to get to know the students after a while how they’re gonna operate’ (TA3: 75-76). Similar points are made by TA5 (313-4), TA6 (65-70) and TA8 (154-5, 580-581).

#### 11. Sense of being a ‘go-between’

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■			■	■	■		■

The sense of being ‘in between’ is a repeating theme. TA1 describes herself as a ‘go between ... not one or the other ...’ (389-90) TA4 says she is a ‘liaison between... some students and the teacher’ (310) and TA5 describes being ‘Beside them and working with them’ (35). TA6 refers to ‘in between roles ... caught in the middle sometimes and it’s hard to find a place’ (TA6: 366-368). TA8’s turn of phrase is ‘the meat between the sandwich ...communicator between the 2’ (TA8: 85-87).



### 12. 'Mainstream' and 'base'.

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
?	?		■	■	■		

TAs 4, 5 and 6 all spell out a clearly delineated sense of the 'mainstream' school and 'base' within it as being separate entities with distinct characteristics. For TA4, this extends to her own sense of 'inclusion', feeling 'very much a part of the Inclusion Department ... more ... than sometimes the mainstream school' (206-215). TA5 is more explicit in the view that 'we include the students up here but I sometimes feel we're apart from the school, we're a unit within and apart from the school' (159-160). TA6's analysis is detailed and offers reasons why pupils may wish to 'stay up here with you' in the base (304-307). While other TAs are less explicit and do not use the words 'mainstream' and 'base' in the same sense, it is also possible to discern in the comments of TAs 1 and 2 the sense of separation between supporting those who can largely keep up with 'the curriculum' and the very different experience of supporting those who cannot. While strictly speaking not metonymy, since 'mainstream' and 'base' are not exactly place-names, the sense of place as reifying the two 'distinctive' groups which has been contested at least since the Warnock Report, the 'handicapped' and 'non-handicapped' (DES 1978, p.100) is evident.

### 13. Positive affect for the job

TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6	TA7	TA8
■	■			■		■	■

TAs express strikingly positive emotions towards their work, even when discussing considerable difficulty and frustration (TA1 526- 530, TA2 152, TA5 354- 355, TA7 586-589, TA8 552-3). TA1 refers to not being able 'to leave it alone' (526-530), TA7 even to the point of feeling 'stuck' through love of the job and therefore not wanting 'to do anything else' despite the frustrations (586-589). TA8 reports staying in her job

because she likes 'it here very much and I really do prize my role... best thing I ever went for' (552-3).

Drawing together the ideas explored in this section (B), in order to respond to Maclure's (2003) compelling question 'how is it possible to know that, to think that, to say that...?' (p.178), it is possible to caricature the points of commonality as follows. TAs live an experience which is not subject-specific, which demands sensitivity as there is something which needs to be handled with discretion. TAs see their performance as one of a 'go-between' with limited advance information in dynamic situations led by teachers where differentiation is limited and practice is less than inclusive. In short and with exceptions in most respects they portray an experience which is embraced and relished but an ongoing challenge.

### **Points of difference between the TAs**

There are similarities in the expressed perceptions of TAs 2 and 8 when compared with those of the other TAs. They seem more positive in their perceptions of their situation and with the offer for pupils than other TAs. While any analysis of differences in such a small group is inconclusive, three possible explanations are noted: level of qualification, subject orientation and differing perceptions of their grounding orientation at work.

TAs 2 and 8 are two of the three who are qualified to (national qualification framework) level 5 with Foundation Degrees. Conversely, the TAs who are perhaps most critical are TAs 1 and 7 who both gained BA first class honours degrees (as shown on table 3.3).

Apart from their qualifications, TAs 2 and 8 also express orientation to and satisfaction from their department roles (English and Science respectively). In both cases, however, they also work in other subjects and roles. TA2 for example explains that up to 16 of her 21 hours per week are for English intervention. However, it is the English intervention which she focuses upon during the interview. When TA2 expresses unhappiness it is about unmet needs in pupils with SEN and elsewhere and she almost distances herself from 'core' TAs who 'do all but that sort of thing'

which ‘passes me by because I’m in department here (396-397). TA8 describes her move to become Higher Level TA in Science as ‘the best thing I ever went for’ and a prized role (552-553). Both participants comment on strong relationships within departments, their sense of inclusion by teachers and knowing routines and coursework well.

On the evidence of pronoun analysis, TAs 2 and 8 use ‘we’ very differently from the other participants. TA2 uses ‘we’ to refer to the combined school team about 23 times compared to references to herself and other TAs twice, teachers once and pupils 5 times. TA8 uses ‘we’ to include pupils 10 times, other TAs about 13 times and a teacher/s 15 times. A further 27 ‘we’ references are to the department / school team. Twice ‘we’ indicates TA8 as part of a class team. Thus ‘we’ overwhelmingly refers to teachers/department and school around 42 times as compared to 13 times for TAs. By contrast, TAs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 could be consistently seen as broadly positioning themselves with other TAs, rather than subject departments or school. In perhaps the most striking example, TA5 ‘uses the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to herself with other TAs about 87 times, compared to 11 times in relation to school as a whole. She used ‘we’ to include pupils twice. Strikingly, however, ‘we’ appears not to be used to clearly indicate a teacher / TA combination. Thus, pronoun analysis of the interviews with TAs 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7 suggests TA alignment with other TAs and a focus on the pupils rather than alignment with or focus upon teachers / school.

Broadly speaking, differing perceptions of their grounding or orientation at work could be grouped in four ways: TAs 1 and 7 mainly work across subjects with a range of pupils who have a range of needs. TA4 is primarily employed for an individual pupil and works across his subjects. TAs 5 and 6 are wholly ‘SEN’- oriented but within a Learning Support base in the school. TAs 2, 3 and 8 are primarily subject-oriented, albeit each spends time supporting pupils with ‘SEN’.

Of these, the TAs working within the subject seem most positive. While TAs 5 and 6 are critical of much of the ‘mainstream’ offer, they themselves seem entirely confident and express none of the hurt and difficulty expressed by TAs 1, 4 and 7. TA1’s personal feelings of ‘real pressure and stress’ (185-188) ‘dread’ (197) and ‘feeling... so guilty for such a long time’ (520- 523) resonate with TA4’s ‘you start to then

question... what's your job, what you doing there?'(295-296).Feelings such as TA 7's 'under-valued and under – appreciated' (423), 'unjust' treatment (579) and being 'stuck' (589) are not expressed in anything like such a heartfelt manner by others. However caution is important. TA3 is the other participant who is both largely subject – oriented and has a Foundation Degree and does not express the degree of satisfaction as TAs 2 and 8, especially interesting given that TA8 is a colleague in the same school.

## **SECTION C CONFRONTING: HOW DID IT COME TO BE LIKE THIS?**

Within stages b and c, 'informing' and 'confronting', the heart of Luker's 'explanans' (2008, p.52), several theoretical lenses are employed. Insights from Goffman, Foucault and Derrida are deployed, essentially to tackle the 'why' question (as highlighted by Luker 2008, p.55). *Why* do TAs perceive their work in inclusion as they describe?

### **GOFFMAN**

#### ***Stigma and 'the wise'***

Goffman's ideas were not considered at the research design stage but offer interesting lenses through which to view the findings since his work includes consideration of 'stigmatised' individuals (1963), a 'medical model' (1961) and an extensive range of 'frames' for organising experience (1974).

Stigmatised individuals are disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963, p.9) and one of Goffman's bases for individuals being deemed 'wise' in relation to the 'stigmatised' is working in establishments catering to their 'needs' and knowing them well (Goffman 1963, p.42). Thus, for example, Goffman suggests that police may be the people who, through knowledge of criminals, accept them 'for what [they] are' (p. 42). As detailed in section B, the sense of TAs feeling they know the pupils with 'SEN' better than teachers do, 'know what makes them tick' (TA1: 405-408) is a recurring theme (TA3: 75-76, TA5: 313-4, TA6 : 65-70 and TA8: 154-5, 580-581) and was the topic that made me look afresh at Goffman.

A second basis for 'wisdom' is a 'relationship leading others to treat both individuals in some respects as one', stigma thus by extension for the wise (Goffman 1963, p. 43). Some TAs see others' perceptions of them as congruent with views of their pupils with 'SEN' as somehow 'lesser'. Thus, TA4's 'only being a TA you're so at the bottom of the ladder (TA4: 213), even 'not really wanted in this classroom' (TA4: 227-228) has common ground with TA5's comment that she does not 'necessarily feel

that we're included in the school, we include the students... but... we're apart from the school... a unit within and apart' (159-160). In a sense, both pupils and TAs may be seen as 'outsiders'. Perhaps the most challenging example is TA5's 'dumping ground' (186). This is literally whispered but presumably there is an understanding about what is normally dumped in a dumping ground and the status of the ground itself. There can also be occasional treatment of TAs as pupils so that both TAs 7 and 8 relate being 'told off' while the teacher is talking. Teacher reference to pupils such as 'those kids... so weak, I can't teach them... you have them, I can't have them' (TA6: 152-158) may also be echoed in reported perceptions of TAs in teachers' eyes, 'what do we know?' (TA3: 177) or 'it takes a lot of getting used to from the teachers that these people may know... quite a lot' (TA5: 309-310). Interestingly, there do not appear to be any such derogatory reported references to TAs in the words of TAs 2 and 8.

Goffman further portrays the 'wise' as those 'sympathetic' to stigmatised individuals, 'ready to adopt [their] standpoint in the world' (1963, p. 31). This resonates with statements such as TA1's description of teachers as 'the official one ... whereas I'm just part of ... there for them really' (98-99) and 'not one or the other. I'm not official ...' (389-90), 'on the child's side' (406). Similarly, TA1 and TA7 empathise with students' feelings repeatedly as in TA7's 'perfectly acceptable' (75-76) (pupil wish to avoid attracting attention) and the pupil who 'hates the fact that he needs the help ... you have to understand ... it must be hard for him to be in that position' (248-251).

One further set of 'wise' attributes are those who share a 'stigma' themselves. Interestingly, three of the TAs have disclosed disabilities (to the researcher) and TA7 refers to problematic areas in relation to a period of feeling socially excluded in her own schooling (TA7: 316-317).

### ***The 'go-between'***

Discrepant roles in social interaction also include Goffman's 'go-between' (1959, p. 148) who 'learns the secrets of each side' tending to give each side the impression of loyalty (p.148). This a repeating theme in the interviews with TA1 describing herself in precisely these words, a 'go between ... not one or the other ...' (389-90). TA4 says

she is a 'liaison between... some students and the teacher' (310) and TA8 'the meat between the sandwich ...communicator between the 2' (TA8: 85-87). Goffman describes 'go-between' behaviour as 'bizarre, untenable and undignified, vacillating as it does from one set of appearances and loyalties to another' (p.149). While none of the TAs uses such strong language, the sense of pressure is recurring and TA6 perhaps encapsulates it as 'in between roles ... caught in the middle sometimes and it's hard to find a place' (TA6: 366-368).

## ***Shame***

For Goffman, when stigmatised individuals sense that others do not accept them on equal grounds, 'shame becomes a central possibility' (1963, p.18). The recurring sense of TAs working to sustain discretion for the pupils' sake is, in the everyday sense, unremarkable, 'commonsense' classroom behaviour. However, taking 'shame' into account, it is striking that someone properly employed in a learning support role feels the needs to 'sneak' (TA8: 37, 38), 'glide' (TA8: 42), 'sidle' (TA8: 606), 'up the corner... out of the way... hidden' (TA6: 11-12). With Goffman's perspective, TAs' drive to use the cover of chatter in order to speak with pupils (TA4: 89-91), 'run down ... discreetly' (TA3: 93-94) and so on simply because pupils learn at differing rates and to differing degrees can be less 'taken for granted'. The efforts of TAs to be discreet echo the pupils' attempts to avoid drawing attention to themselves (TA1:114, TA3: 73, TA7:75), both groups seem intent on staying 'under the radar'.

## ***The 'asylum' and its staff***

While Goffman's (1961) work focuses on total institutions, it is possible to perceive parallels in contemporary frames for disability and 'SEN'. Goffman sees that 'asylum' staff members in 'continuous contact with inmates' may feel they have a contradictory task, coercing their charges into obedience while demonstrating that 'rational goals of the institution' are achieved (p.88). Elements of this feeling may be reflected in the comments of several TAs:

‘we were forcing him ... I still had to go into the lesson with him and he had to do the work and it was a battle’ (TA 1: 471 - 473).

‘ for little mini - tests and exams [he] wouldn’t revise... didn’t want ... any help that you could give... it was a constant uphill battle’ (TA 4: 413 – 417).

‘ ... mini - prison for children... no choice to come ... locked up with loads of people they probably wouldn’t be with... so I think you’ve got to have something extra there for a lot of children’ (TA 6: 170 - 175).

‘sometimes for their own safety we have to escort them around school and they can’t go out into the mainstream school’ (TA5: 380 – 381).

TAs 2, 3 and 8, with their more subject-oriented, rather than SEN-oriented, deployment, do not seem to make comments of this nature.

Writing of ‘psychotics’, Goffman (1961) describes the situation where a highly skilled individual offers brief intervention but low skill levels in maintaining the environment . Attendants are, by comparison, often ‘as well equipped’ in relation to patients as psychiatrists (p. 311). For Goffman, one of the features of such establishments is to sustain the ‘self-conception of staff’. ‘Thus, inmates and lower staff levels are involved in a ‘vast supportive action... that has the effect, if not the purpose, of affirming that a medical-like service is in progress here and that the psychiatric staff is providing it’ (Goffman 1961, p. 335), as indicated by TA3’s sense of pupils with TAs all day everyday but seen by specific teachers just once per fortnight (278-281) and perhaps through surveillance’ as suggested in the case of TA4. Goffman (1961) indicates that a hospital patient may become alienated from wider society and unwilling to leave (p.310), as in the situation reported by TA6, ‘can I stay up here with you?’ (304).

### ***Passing***

Goffman’s concept of ‘passing’ is also of interest. This ‘management of discrediting information about self’ (1963, p. 58), can be seen as actively supported by TAs. Apart from discretion and avoidance of ‘shame’, there are explicit references such as TA



3's aspiration 'that [pupils] don't stand out more than the others, that they just fit in' (212) and TA4's avoiding sitting beside a pupil with cerebral palsy 'because I don't want to make him feel different' (65 -66). It seems most explicit when TA2 refers to a boy where her job is 'keeping him up with the work, keeping him in with the work, he's included in, he's doing his coursework he's going to do his GCSEs ... But a lot of the TAs spend a lot of time with the girl with Down Syndrome...' (239-242) and others where TA2 questions whether needs are being met.

### ***Cooling the mark out***

Goffman's concept of 'cooling', borrowed from the criminal 'underworld', is a further 'adaptation to failure' (Goffman 1952 cited by King 1973, pp. 56-57) and of interest regarding the TA role. The 'mark' is the victim of a confidence trick who, on realising his loss, may need 'cooling out' in order to avoid complaints which could alert potential victims or the authorities. The cooler 'defines the situation in such a way as to make it easy for the mark to accept his loss, his failure' (King, p.57). King applied the concept to U.S schools struggling to educate black, poor, inner-city children and introducing special education programmes to 'cool them out' rather than re-consider their own traditional methods (p.58). TA2's words are amongst those which resonate here in respect to a pupil 'who did not 'develop very well but... his friends ...were good with him and they kept him ... he got 6 GCSEs... all Fs...but he got them... he had a scribe... and... a reader... mum was really pleased' (TA2, 361-366). TA6's comments about being able to provide an altogether more pleasant environment in the base could also be seen as making school more palatable for the pupils with SEN.

<p>In broad terms, therefore, a reading of the data with Goffman's ideas suggests that TAs perceive their work in inclusion in terms of relationship with individuals with 'spoiled identity'. As the 'wise' support individuals in 'passing', avoiding 'shame' and even 'cooling out', at once coercing and supporting individuals in the mainstream school 'institution' and being coerced by and supporting the institution.</p>
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## **FOUCAULT**

The words of the TAs are next reviewed in the light of Foucauldian ideas of discipline, punishment and psychiatric power which resonate with the field of 'SEN' (Allan 1999, p. 18). As ever, writing in a historical context but implying or inviting modern parallel, Foucault points out the tautology that 'psychiatric power' makes school function as 'absolute reality' in relation to which the idiot will be defined as an idiot' (1974a, p. 218). Education acts as a 'filter' for 'retardation' so that children who 'do not follow school activities in an appropriate way ... make themselves noted by their unruliness' (1975a, pp. 43-44). In the words of TA5 they are: 'Too hot to handle or they can't deal with them, and there is nowhere else that'll have them, can't you go to Learning Support, so there is that kind of... dumping ground' (TA5: 189-192).

### ***Disciplinary power***

All TAs except TA3 use the word 'mainstream'. TA1 and TA2 use this to mean a mainstream as opposed to special school (TA1: 253, 430; TA2: 341). TA5 and TA6 also both use it in this sense once (TA5: 381, TA6: 191). This amounts to 5 uses of the word in the 'type of school' sense. The word 'mainstream' is however used to delineate the 'main', and by implication not 'SEN', part of the school as opposed to a Learning Support / SEN base 18 times (TA4: 212, 217, TA5: 4,4,6,48,61, 130, 130, 144, 171, 381, 398, TA6: 8, 11, 76, 168, 263, 359). It should be noted that the word also appears in researcher questions and none of this is surprising. However, it is the reification of the term 'mainstream' in the words of these 'mainstream' practitioners that is of interest.

TAs also note the divide between mainstream and 'their' pupils with comments such as 'sometimes for their own safety we have to escort them around ...they can't go out into the mainstream school' nor be 'left to wander round the school on their own (TA5:342, 380-381 ). TAs 2, 4, 5, 6 all comment on significant differences between 'mainstream' and 'base', not only for pupils but for themselves. For example, TAs 5 and 6 comment on lack of differentiation in mainstream compared to base (TA5: 397, TA6: 263-264). TA6 refers to more greater responsibility and knowing 'exactly what I'm doing' (TA6:89) in the base as compared to mainstream. She describes the base

as 'calm' (170), 'less formal ...' 'more consistent', where 'we never tell them off though or issue them with a consequence for not having a pen... behaviour's so much better' (TA6: 336-344). TA4 feels 'very much a ...key member in that Inclusion Department... included by the other staff... when I was in the mainstream, it was down to the teachers,' (TA4:208-217). Conversely, subject-based TA2 indicates a base with pupils relatively isolated (214, 229) and a 'dumbed down' curriculum (205, 250) supported by TAs whose 'work largely 'passes me by' (397). However, perhaps these differing standpoints just further enhance the sense that, whatever the preference, a divide between 'mainstream' and 'base' never seems in doubt. Foucault sees disciplinary power as having the double property of discarding individuals yet always 'normalizing', 'inventing ever new recovery systems, always re-establishing the rule'(1973b, p. 54). From this Foucauldian perspective, while TAs are clearly an integral element of recovery, a means of including / keeping pupils in mainstream (as opposed to special) schools, at one level their words reify and perpetuate the 'notion of treating handicapped and non-handicapped children as... two distinctive groups' as contested by Warnock (DES 1978, p.100), re - locating the special / mainstream school debate inside ordinary schools. In Foucault's plague analogy 'of the inclusion of plague victims' (1975a, p.44), with 'plague' towns divided and inspected so that individuals are not driven out but 'established' and 'fixed' in 'their own place' (p.48). Thus, for Foucault, power operates not by separating and excluding but 'according to differential individualities' (p.48).

## **Surveillance**

TAs' use of the explicit metaphorical language of surveillance is striking. TA3's metaphors include: 'scanning' (8), 'crowd control (43) 'barrier' (between pupils, 49,107) and 'spy' (175). TA4 uses 'pinpoint' 3 times (126, 137,191) as well as 'picking things out' (197) and 'slip the net' (361, 368). TAs 5, 6 and TA7 'keep an eye on' students (TA5: 25, TA6: 201, TA7: 18, 159) and TA6's metaphor includes 'hovering' (24), 'picked up' (240), 'fallen behind' (240) and 'eye opener' (220). TA8 describes guarding the door (472).TA6 also uses a slightly different slant on surveillance in 'mother hens' (317) and 'little angels' (169) which is echoed in TA1's

'wean' (293) 'mollycoddle' (123), 'babysit' (500) and 'little girl' [with Down Syndrome] (236). These are all everyday expressions but for Foucault, disciplinary power exists through such tiny matters, the 'capillary form... by which political power ... finally reaches the level of bodies ... to work on, modify, and direct ... the soft fibers of the brain' (Foucault, 1973b, p. 40).

Remaining with surveillance, Foucault believes that his interpretation of Bentham's 'Panopticon' (1975b p. 205), can be seen in schools. (1973c, p. 79). This architecturally expressed model of power depicts a backlit observation tower. Occupants in 'cells' in the surrounding ring are visible while the observer remains unseen. The power of 'uninterrupted assessment' (1973c p.77) is wielded even when the tower is vacant as, at any time, any observer may be there. The power is of mind over mind (1973c p. 74) with 'permanent visibility that assures automatic functioning of power' (1975b, p. 201).

The Panopticon model is interesting for this research in a number of respects. TAs often comment on the demands of the curriculum as in TA2's words 'the teacher's got to get through the work, it's got to be done... it can be a bit quick for them' (144-146). TA1 perhaps expresses this most strongly in her comment that 'flexibility... [is] not available, it can't be, everything's so rigid they have to follow this rigid curriculum and stick to it, come what may' (479-481) so that the only solution for one pupil was transfer to a PRU. While critique of rigidity in the National Curriculum is more or less *de rigueur* in everyday discourse, TA1's words 'it can't be', viewed with Foucault's insight suggest that this could be much more subtle than any individual directive, indeed there is none. The National Curriculum inclusion statement allows, even demands that 'teachers should teach... in ways that suit their pupils' abilities...choosing knowledge, skills and understanding from earlier or later stages so that individual pupils can make progress'. It stresses a '...flexible approach ...much greater degree of differentiation... planning learning appropriate to the requirements of their pupils. (QCDA no date, pp. 55-56). Thus, it is the cell-occupants rather than the watcher imposing the discipline. From this point of view, TAs could be seen to both police and participate in a rigid and 'quick' curriculum offer since 'Power does not belong to anyone or even to a group; there is only power because there is

dispersion, relays, networks, reciprocal supports, differences of potential, discrepancies, etcetera. It is in this system of differences... that power can start to function' (Foucault 1973a, p.4).

### ***Hierarchical observation***

Discrepancies and differences are also seen in TAs' perceptions of their role. TAs are clearly in authority over the pupils and sometimes expected to 'control the behaviour of the class' (TA5: 333-334). There are frequent references to surveillance of pupils (as above). TAs can position themselves as more knowledgeable and competent in inclusive practice than teachers, for example not taking 'account of the full scope of learning needs' (TA6: 256-257), not differentiating 'as often as...we would like (TA7: 143-145), perpetuating copying from the board (TA3 138-140), not providing learning objectives (TA8: 94-98) and so on. TAs adopt the role of pointing out such difficulties to the teacher 'have a quiet word with the teacher ... make them aware ...call the teacher over (140-142). Yet, in contrast, the ironic 'what do we know?' (TA3: 177) and remarks such as 'bottom of the ladder (TA4: 213), 'not really wanted' (TA4: 227-228) and 'dumping ground' (TA5:186), present a less sanguine picture. TAs 7 and 8 refer to being 'told off' while the teacher is talking. Just as teachers sometimes 'don't want that child, (TA5:204) TAs themselves may be excluded by a teacher's 'I've never had help before, so why do I want you now' (TA4: 193-194). In Foucault's terms, 'even the person in charge of a disciplinary system ... is himself subject to discipline' (1973b, p55).

It is possible to perceive some complex balances and counterbalances between TA and teacher mastery. This is a finely balanced movement, even a 'chaotic pendulum'<sup>15</sup>. Just for example, TA3 uses language which separates TAs from 'school staff' in that 'you hear a lot more, they [the pupils] ... talk to you the way they wouldn't talk to a member of staff (295) and uses the pronoun 'they' rather than 'we' when talking about the ethos of the school, 'they're quite an accepting school' (224). On the

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<sup>15</sup> 'Chaotic pendulum' here refers to mechanical models such that on display in a St. Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol demonstrating that there are situations in which it is not always possible to predict the way in which water will flow.

other hand, she twice positions herself as a teacher, referring to 'another teacher's lesson' (249) and 'watching other teachers' (269). Similarly, TA8 twice refers to 'staff' (26, 344) in a general way which implicitly or explicitly includes TAs but on the other 11 occasions when she uses the word, the context indicates that 'staff' means the teachers and therefore could imply that TAs are not 'staff' (132, 132, 218, 272, 335, 336, 341, 345, 435, 440, 542).

Foucault's (1973a) reference to 'servants' (p. 5), appearing to serve the 'patient' himself as well as the 'supervisors' and 'doctor', observing 'patients' behaviour' from all angles instead of from above as 'supervisors and the doctor' (p.5) may comprise 'a tactical arrangement in which different individuals occupy a definite place and ensure a number of precise functions' that enable power to be exercised (p. 6). This sense of surveillance is especially strong with TA4.

### ***Spatialisation***

Overall, the TAs perceive clear physical spaces for their work. All were asked about physical positioning in class and often stated that they do not adopt the 'velcro' approach of sitting next to designated pupils (TA2: 29-46, TA3: 10, TA7: 15), perhaps best summed up by TA1's 'not stuck together ... none of that' (292). On the other hand, TA6's references to being 'near the back... up the corner, just out of the way... hidden'(11-12) are typical of references to discretion which include physical discretion as detailed above. There are parallels in pupils' positioning in TA1's pupil 'at the back of the classroom because we were no longer part of the lesson' (227-228). Foucault argued that:

'practices of division, classification and ordering around a norm have become the primary means by which to individualize people, who come to be understood scientifically, and who even come to understand themselves in this mode. Indeed the power of the modern state ... is inextricably intertwined with and dependent upon, its capacity to generate an increasing specification of individuality' (Tremain 2005, p.6).

In broad terms, therefore, a reading of the data with elements of Foucauldian thinking in mind can portray TAs as agents of subtle disciplinary power, surveillance and spatialisation in the management of pupils with SEN. These functions co-exist with supporting individuals in the mainstream school, even as the TAs are themselves constrained by curriculum, teachers and the school.

## DERRIDA

### ***Aporias and sous rature***

The aspiration here is to use Derridean ideas in contributing to deconstruction of what Maclure (2003) describes as the 'institutionalized common sense that naturalizes binary oppositions and the inequalities that they distribute' (p. 181).

Aporias and '*sous rature*' are deployed to try to move beyond binaries (Burman and Maclure 2005, p. 286), in this case inclusion and exclusion and to examine, '*sous rature*', inclusion, that which is not inclusion but not 'quite' exclusion but has traces of both. The term 'inclusion' is necessary for this research, not least because inclusion policy is a key root for TA employment and a word freely used in schools, TA4, for example, is based in an 'Inclusion Department'. '*Sous rature*', or putting the word under erasure, therefore seeks to explore the possibilities for considering the word 'without' its accumulated baggage of meanings. Any attempt to summarise these 8 TAs' perceptions of inclusion is partial and limited by researcher understanding. However my reading in this project could be summarised as follows:

- TA 1: Inclusion as mainstreaming, with TA role to 'soften the blow', especially for pupils with emotional difficulties, taking their 'side' as advocate.
- TA2: Inclusion as successful mainstreaming for those able to 'keep up' with the curriculum but an ordeal for others who therefore remain largely separate.
- TA3: Inclusion as achieved by hard work and almost by subterfuge, discreet support in the face of a range of barriers.
- TA4: Inclusion as active struggle to be included and to broker pupils' inclusion through 'handling' teachers and fast-moving surveillance.
- TA5: Inclusion through strong alternative provision by TAs, including refuge function of the separate 'base'.
- TA6: Inclusion as provided by strong alternative provision by TAs with separation of 'mainstream' and 'base'.
- TA7: Inclusion through shared struggle, TAs and pupils similarly besieged, sometimes successful, sometimes less so.
- TA8: Inclusion through personal strength, using an extensive 'tool box' of strategies with pupils and teachers.



In short, therefore, at the very least, the TAs in this study communicate a range of different experiences of inclusion and would thereby enact it differently from each other but also possibly significantly differently from other 'stakeholders'. While deeply aware of the difficulties, it may be that these TAs are saying 'yes' to inclusion in the sense in which Allan (2008) cites Derrida as affirming inclusion without 'maybe' but repeatedly working for it in practice (Allan, pp. 163-4). On the other hand, with the possible exception of TAs 3, 5 and 8, they are working with the 'baggage' of inclusion as a supported sphere within a reified 'mainstream' where much practice is still exclusive and even minor 'reasonable adjustments' to curriculum and classroom practice are not necessarily made.

Derrida argues that binaries are 'violent' with temporary stability only achieved by suppression of the 'other' side of the binary (Burman and Maclure p. 286). The Derridean 'ethical' stance is to try to glimpse traces of what has been suppressed or 'othered' (p. 286). This seems particularly apposite as the TAs so often seem to be negotiating borderlines. Sometimes this is explicit where TAs describe themselves as 'go-betweens' or 'neither one nor the other' 'not official' (TA1 389 -390) or discuss the differences between 'mainstream' and 'base' (TAs 4, 5 and 6). At other times it is implicit, for example clearly needing to support the pupil and the lesson but with great discretion, even 'under cover' and without knowledge of the lesson plan. So very much is unspoken and unarticulated so that TAs operate in the spaces that appear. As described by Mansaray (2006), TAs typically work in just such flux and ambivalence, negotiating boundaries, 'like' and 'not like' a teacher (p.178), even within a single lesson. Ball, writing of Bourdieu, argues for exploration of 'how agency and structure are implicit in each other, rather than being the two poles of a continuum' (Harker and May 1993, cited by Ball 1994, p. 15) and this is very clear in the accounts of some TAs.

In summary, therefore, a reading of the data with elements of Derridean thinking in mind can help illuminate aspects of inclusion, exclusion and inclusion / exclusion as lived out by the TAs in this study. In particular, the way their work includes and excludes can be seen as struggle, even through 'the small and inconspicuous repetitions that weave the precarious fabric of daily life' (Caputo 1997, p. 200).

## **SECTION D RECONSTRUCTING: HOW MIGHT THINGS BE DIFFERENT?**

This project is not action research and falls into the category where attempts to make recommendations would inevitably seem 'trite' (Thomas 2009, p.236) and, unsupported by evidence, since this was never the aim. However, against the context of the recurrent findings of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and on the basis of this project, communication with TAs would seem paramount. In short, explicit dialogue on the subject of 'inclusion', and, more specifically, what it is that TA might do when working to 'include' students in 'mainstream' school would be of value. As well as communication about curriculum and lesson plans it would be valuable to listen further to TA voices. Thus, in the spirit of 'micro' scale research, micro 'reconstruction' would be indicated. For example, if TA6's perception is that, while some teachers communicate, 'some just say thanks, Miss, for the lesson and never kind of start any kind of conversation with you' (131-132), then encouraging some 'kind of conversation' would be progress. The approach is in the tradition of Thomas' ideas on 'children who don't behave' where small-scale practical considerations such as fair queuing systems or attention to clean toilets are as much a part of 'managing' behaviour as grander ideas predicated on 'within-pupil' needs (Thomas and Loxley 2007, p.61). Similarly, Visser's 'eternal verities' include 'transparency in communication' and 'building positive relations' (2002). While Visser is writing primarily of human values in educational approaches to pupils with 'EBD' it can be argued that the principles have much wider applicability in education. In short, furthering communication and relationships with TAs through eliciting their views is worthwhile.

At a personal, professional level, I have broached these ideas with students on the range of courses where I am a tutor: a Foundation Degree in Learning Support, B.A. in Education Studies, PGCE, M.A. in Special and Inclusive Education and a Postgraduate Certificate with National Award for SENCos. Each course has some participants who are currently or formerly TAs and, in differing proportions and degrees of responsibility, responsibility for managing the work of TAs. Students are presented with findings such as the DISS headline that 'the more support pupils

received, the less progress they made' (2009, p.2, 2012, p.38) and those who are either TAs or SENCOs have, on the whole, reacted with understandable dismay or disbelief in relation to this finding. However, with the DISS study's reassurance that this is not a 'criticism' and with structured questioning about their own feelings about their deployment, a space for constructive thinking can be created. I was pleased to be copied into a recent email exchange between Peter Blatchford of the DISS research and a student taking one of my MA modules, herself a TA and interrogating the work of TAs for an assignment, they were at least having a 'kind of conversation'.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

The 8 experienced TAs in this study offer many insights about their work in the inclusion of pupils with SEN in secondary schools. They see their work as demanding sensitivity and discretion. They describe themselves performing as ‘go-betweens’, between teachers and pupils and, in some cases, between ‘mainstream’ and ‘base’ within the school. They generally have limited advance information in dynamic situations led by teachers, where (with exceptions) differentiation may be limited and practice less than inclusive. They tactfully navigate these various areas, deeply challenged by, but also relishing, their work.

I will argue in this final chapter that the TAs’ discourse can be seen, in certain respects, as redolent of practice in SEN in former years, albeit in a wholly subtler way than in the past. Maclure’s (2003) question is fundamental here in addressing possible explanations for the way TAs see their work, as she asks, ‘how is it possible to know that, to think that, to say that?’ (Maclure, p.178). For example, if a TA feels that they are ‘unofficial’ or ‘on the opposite side of the desk from the teacher’ or need to differentiate surreptitiously or catch a pupil ‘bang to rights’ (and so on), then what is the vision of inclusion and learning support in operation?

I would argue that, in some respects, these graduate TAs working in good schools (including holders of OfSTED ‘outstanding’ and Inclusion Quality mark status) perceive themselves as being deployed to greater or lesser extents in a thinly veiled medical model or, at best, a simplistic version of the social model<sup>16</sup>. To caricature, this model can be expressed as follows: certain pupils cannot cope with the curriculum. These TAs will therefore deal with them. Using Goffman’s work, in particular, it is possible to discern TAs as deployed in ‘cooling the mark out’ or acting as ‘wise’ in managing the ‘spoiled identity’ of pupils with SEN. This perspective could help explain a range of phenomena, from the claim reported in this study that teachers do not seek out TA reports or intelligence on pupils (since these are not what is required), to relative lack of efficacy in raising achievement as evidenced in

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<sup>16</sup> In Rieser’s terms, possibly ‘medical model 2’, medical model 1 describing explicit segregation, model 2 incorporating support to function normally, dependent on type and severity of impairment (2012, p.166).

the large-scale DISS research (since raising achievement is not necessarily the aim). It could also help explain the relative success (evidenced in the literature) within affective domains for both pupils and teachers (since that *is* the focus). Goffman's model is not entirely related to the affective domain, but is perhaps in closer alignment with the data than emotional labour *per se*.

This final chapter now returns to the research questions, synthesising the findings. The overall contribution is then summarised, the project evaluated and final reflections offered.

## **A. The research questions and the TAs' responses**

The central research questions were:

- **How do experienced TAs perceive their work in the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream secondary schools?**
- **Why do they perceive their work and interpret inclusion as they do?**
- **What can we learn from TAs about the daily 'practice' of 'inclusion'?**

Three sub-questions about more practical classroom matters were posed directly to TAs in order to help explore these central research questions. Responses to these 'sub' questions are first considered in turn:

*Sub-question 1: How, where and why do TAs position themselves, both physically and in relation to others in school?* Physically, with the exception of TA1, TAs said that, when supporting in class, they avoid basing themselves beside individual pupils wherever possible, instead standing at vantage points (typically at the back or side of the room) and scanning or moving around in order to spot difficulty. They report being unobtrusive but proactive in class with social positioning as a 'go-between' indicated in at least 5 interviews. On the basis of views expressed and the discourse analysis, 2 of the 3 TAs deployed by faculty align themselves more with the social context of the department / school team and the other 6 align themselves with other TAs, focussing on pupils, rather than department, teachers or school.

*Sub-question 2: How and why do TAs respond to pupils during the lesson?* TAs indicate that they offer diverse responses, depending on their assessment of the nature of pupil difficulty. This includes, for example, allowing advice to be overheard, producing a differentiated worksheet or explanation, re-capping, prompting, scribing or advocating on behalf of pupils. TAs report close surveillance of and knowledge of the pupils. They indicate working proactively in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves or to pupils, keeping pupils 'up' with the lesson or providing alternatives as appropriate. TAs' perceptions are that they are either first to spot the difficulty or are approached by pupils, rather than being actively deployed by teachers.

*Sub-question 3: How do TAs share their intelligence about their work?* Generally, TAs report barriers to sharing their intelligence with teachers, tending to see the responsibility as lying with themselves alone and needing to seek out the teachers, rather than this being invited or required in a systematic way.

In broad summary, evidence in relation to these three sub-questions indicates fluidity both in use of space and response to pupil need. TAs report working on the physical periphery, patrolling in surveillance mode. They align themselves in different ways, according to role orientation, allowing pupils discretion. They broadly indicate that teachers neither actively deploy them nor seek intelligence from them.

Returning now to the three central research questions, reproduced in the box below, each is considered in turn.

<p><b>How do experienced TAs perceive their work in the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream secondary schools?</b></p> <p><b>Why do they perceive their work and interpret inclusion as they do?</b></p> <p><b>What can we learn from TAs about the daily 'practice' of 'inclusion'?</b></p>
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## **How do experienced TAs perceive their work in the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream secondary schools?**

TAs tend to perceive their work in inclusion as something they actively struggle for. Only in respect of those pupils for whom keeping up with normative curriculum expectations is relatively straightforward (as for some of TA2's pupils) does *inclusion* seem relatively straightforward. By contrast, TAs perceive themselves as engaged in advocacy (TA1), subterfuge (TA3), brokerage and surveillance (TA4), alternative provision (TAs 5 and 6), shared struggle (TA7) and energetic deployment of professional strategies (TA8), in pursuit of their goals with the pupils.

There is some evidence of emotional labour (Hochschild 2003) in the ways TAs perceive their work, particularly TAs 1 and 7, and all TAs describe some difficult situations, requiring negotiation and sensitive 'handling' of teachers and pupils. All participants emphasise discretion, both in what they say and in features of the discourse they use. However, TAs also emphasise their own experience and knowledge so emotional labour *per se* does not seem to be as strong a feature as might have been expected from the literature review and pilot. The additional (modest) evidence of the word cloud representing frequency of word use by all 8 TAs (reproduced at appendix 18) also indicates that 'think' and 'know' dominate. The words 'students', 'lesson' and 'teacher' are all more frequent than words indicative of emotion, such as 'understand', 'need' and 'feel'<sup>17</sup>.

In summary, the TAs report inclusion as central to their work, lived out actively in a struggle requiring both skill and sensitivity.

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<sup>17</sup> This is not substantive evidence and there is no control for phrases such as 'you know'. It is included here simply as a matter of interest.

### **Why do TAs perceive their work and interpret inclusion as they do?**

Perceptions of the work in inclusion are closely linked with the relationship with teachers. The dyad is, unsurprisingly, a constant feature, with repeated indication of frustration at perceived limitations in teachers' inclusive practice but simultaneous use of facework and politeness in expression to minimise these limitations. Thus, at times, varying with different teachers, a TA may perceive their work and interpret their work in inclusion as to 'force' a child to comply with expectations (TA1), to keep up with the work (TA2) to make alternative provision for the pupil (TAs 5 and 6) or to support and prompt and insert inclusive practice where it might be lacking from the teacher (TAs 3 and 8). The sense of leader and lead, of structure and agency for the TA, thus seems fluid and dynamic.

In summary, TAs perceive their work and interpret inclusion as they do in constant relationship to teachers. Even when there is little or no explicit contact with the teachers, they see themselves as filling in the gaps, trying to keep the pupils up to speed, and responding in a range of ways according to perceived need.

### **What can we learn from TAs about the daily 'practice' of 'inclusion'?**

At a practical level, the TAs' contributions offer useful insights about the daily practice of inclusion. For example, TA7 mentions that to prevent them feeling 'useless' she would not ask a pupil 'do you need any help?'. Instead, she checks in a 'roundabout' way. There are many other practical ideas such as TA5's introduction of portable word-processors and TA3's strategy of allowing advice to be overheard.

A sense of SEN as spatially regulated is also indicated. Even TA2, the most positive of all, clearly delineates between the pupils who can keep up and those who cannot. The latter are in several senses, separate, eating alone (228) and socially isolated. TAs 4, 5 and 6 all express a clear sense of the 'mainstream' school and 'base' as being separate entities, the base being presented as more accepting, and effective, with distinct characteristics of peacefulness and 'inclusion'. While other TAs do not use the words 'mainstream' and 'base' in the same way, the sense of place as reifying separation of the pupils with and without 'SEN' still seems palpable.



In this study, the TAs' accounts broadly indicate four different working orientations. TAs 1, 4 and 7 work across subjects, TAs 1 and 7 with a range of pupils and TA4 with one pupil. TAs 5 and 6 work with autonomy within a discrete Learning Support base. TAs 2, 3 and 8 are primarily subject-oriented, albeit each spends time supporting pupils with 'SEN'. It would appear that the TAs working across subjects but without a discrete 'SEN' base portray the most difficult situations, with inclusion hardest to secure. The TAs working within a subject department seem most positive, albeit they each recognise the contribution of colleagues with fuller SEN responsibility. While the SEN base TAs are critical of much of the 'mainstream' offer, they are confident and express none of the hurt and difficulty expressed by TAs 1, 4 and 7.

In summary, TAs have developed a range of practices and have a strong sense of 'mainstream' and 'other' within the school. Their own working orientations and positions as either 'mainstream' (TAs 2 and 8 in particular) or 'other' (TAs 5 and 6 in particular) are strong and secure. The most uncomfortable positions, however, with most associated struggle are for TAs 1, 4 and 7 whose work straddles both 'mainstream' and 'base'<sup>18</sup>.

## **B. The insights offered by this study**

This doctoral study's contribution to knowledge is first summarised in relation to the substantive topic of SEN and inclusive education and then in relation to research methods. The claim to knowledge within the substantive topic is in offering some theoretical imagination to consider *why* the limitations in TA practice (both within this study and within the wider literature) may occur. The theoretical imagination applied is insight from the theoretical lenses of Goffman, Foucault and Derrida.

While Goffman can be criticised as portraying disability as a 'discrete and problematic' social role (Grue 2011, p.535), his ideas of 'wisdom' in relation to managing stigma and spoiled identity offer a perspective that others treat both

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<sup>18</sup> This 'bridging' position is clearly common in schools and associated with effective provision by OfSTED (2006).

stigmatised individuals and those near them, in some respects, as one (Goffman 1963, p. 43). Thus TAs may have come to see themselves and their pupils with 'SEN' as somehow 'lesser', in the eyes of others, in Goffman's words, 'ready to adopt [their pupils'] standpoint in the world' (1963, p.31). While TA discretion may be unremarkable, 'commonsense' classroom behaviour, read alongside Goffman's insights on 'shame', it does raise questions about why they all seem to feel such need to 'sneak', 'sidle', 'hide', use the cover of chatter in order to speak with pupils simply in order to do their job, leaving both TAs and students intent on staying 'under the radar'. TAs also explicitly refer to being alongside pupils, just as pronoun analysis and other aspects of the CDA reflect solidarity with them. Perhaps it is the loosely 'therapeutic' general support described by Alborz et al. (2009b) as unsuccessful (p.1) that many TAs are, by default, being deployed to give. In this respect, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the substantive literature in the field finds efficacy more associated with specific interventions (Savage and Carless 2005, Roberts and Norwich 2010, Alborz et al 2009b, p.1) than with generalised approaches. A 'go-between' can only do so much if there is a substantial gap between the pupil and an unreconstructed 'mainstream'. Presumably, too, the possible effects on expectation and self-esteem could be less than ideal.

Although this analysis presents both TAs and pupils as rendered other, with a sense of spoiled identity 'at the bottom of the ladder' (TA4, 213), working in the 'dumping ground' (TA5 191), TAs are not passive respondents to coercive institutional power. TAs may also coerce pupils ('force' TA1:471, 'bang to rights' TA8:529), albeit very gently and there is clear evidence of TA agency in relation to pupils and sometimes teachers, with numerous examples of confidence and indications of competence. TA work can then also be seen in terms of Foucault's disciplinary power, reifying the 'notion of pupils with 'SEN' as a separate group, in effect re-locating the special / mainstream school debate inside ordinary schools. If disciplinary power can be characterised as 'discarding [or anomizing] individuals' yet always 'normalizing' (Foucault 1973b, p.54), pupils are 'normalized' through vigilant support and spatialisation. Their own vigilance is constant and active (though they themselves operate 'under the radar') and the TAs' easy reference to 'mainstream' and 'base', to

supporting the pupils who teachers may find too challenging, itself reifies the separation, both acting with and in response to disciplinary power in the management of pupils with SEN. Thus TAs may be constrained by the curriculum, teachers and the school as well as being active agents.

Derrida's insights help interrogate binaries in the TAs' words, such as the structure / agency dynamic in relation to inclusion and to teachers / the school. They allow examination, in Derrida's terms '*sous rature*', ~~inclusion~~, that which is not inclusion but not 'quite' exclusion but with traces of both inclusion and exclusion. In short, the TAs indicate a range of different experiences of inclusion and therefore enact it differently from each other but are all working with the 'baggage' of inclusion as a supported sphere within a reified 'mainstream' where much practice can therefore be seen as less than inclusive.

Thus, the main contribution of this study is to apply theoretical imagination, using the ideas of Goffman, Foucault and Derrida, to the problem of limitations in TA practice (within this study and the wider literature). In short, given the luxury of the vast amount of information that has been amassed in the TA field by the DISS researchers and so many others, this contributes to the work of deconstruction. There seems little point in amassing further information about TA work without progress in theoretically-informed analysis. The argument here is not that there is one 'right' way of viewing TAs' work theoretically. The argument is simply that it is important for research to have a theoretically-informed lens. Without that, research remains empiricist and prone to 'solutions' that do not acknowledge issues of power, control and inclusion.

The second main contribution of the study is to show that CDA has potential in such educational research. While well-established in the study of classroom talk (typically within lessons), discourse analysis is relatively little deployed in other areas of educational research. It seems, at the very least, a useful adjunct to interviewing, offering a second stage to follow an interview, which so many studies seem to see as

an end point. Similarly, the topic of disability is underexplored in discourse analysis (Grue 2011, pp.532-3) and, by extension, in the area of SEN.

### **C. Evaluation of the study's methodology**

As with all research, the methodology and research processes have potential weaknesses as well as a contribution to make. These are now discussed in turn, in every case beginning with the possible objections:

**There were distinct differences in deployment of the TAs in the study and 'like' was not compared with 'like'.** As discussed above, TA roles and work orientations varied. However, as discussed in chapter 2, comparison and rigid control of variables was never the aim and, without any attempts to a representative sample, the group appears to broadly reflect the variation in role found in large studies such as Brown and Harris (2010) and the DISS research (2012). Many general points made by TAs 1 – 8 are reflected in the wider literature and often reflect findings in much larger studies. For example, Tucker's (2009) work, drawing on three systematic literature reviews reflects on TAs seeing themselves as 'go-betweens' (p.294) and 'spare parts' (p.299) as do TAs 1 and 4 respectively. Some further indicative examples of similar points made by the TAs in this study which reflect those DISS research are indicated in figure 5.1. This is additional evidence, therefore, that the TAs' comments align well with those in other research.

**Figure 5.1**

<b>DISS (2012) page references (below)</b>	<b>TA1 refers</b>	<b>TA2 refers</b>	<b>TA3 refers</b>	<b>TA4 Refers</b>	<b>TA5 refers</b>	<b>TA6 refers</b>	<b>TA7 refers</b>	<b>TA8 refers</b>
<b>Planning and feedback time lacking (p.122)</b>			151 – 163	160 - 169			154-5, 171 - 2, 182 – 4	
<b>Entering lesson ‘blind’ (p.61)</b>			105 – 112		56- 58	75 - 76	153 – 4	325, 344
<b>Subject knowledge issues (p. 66)</b>	160 - 4	132 – 4	244-5			231- 7		
<b>Stigma – discretion / avoid dependence (pp. 89 - 90)</b>	110	56	214-5	91-95	167	33-34	51 - 52, 95 - 97	

**Some of the topics raised in the DISS research and also by TAs 1 – 8.**

Above all, however, this study aspires to explore and contribute to possible explanation and there is no claim to generalisation ‘from few to many’ (Thomas 2012, p. 40), only to trustworthiness.

**The interviews were single, ‘one-off’ events.** Mears’ (2012) assessment that deep reflection ‘requires multiple interviews with each participant’ (p.171) is both persuasive and challenging. Clearly there are limitations in single interviews but while this project cannot uncover ‘truth’ it can explore the personal construction of reality of some individuals. Barriers to repeat interviewing include time constraints but there is

also real danger of 'treading heavily' rather than 'lightly' in ethical terms. However, future research will explore the possibilities for follow-up interview and analysis, while maintaining practical and ethical balance. One possibility is to explore optimising the single interview. The interviews with TAs 5 and 6 offer rich insights and perhaps the serendipitous use of an empty classroom within the SEN base contributed. The TAs gestured within and beyond the room, often referred to place and were perhaps also prompted by interruptions and the ambient sounds of the base. Roulston (2010), for example, suggests asking participants to be given a tour of the location and discuss daily routines as the interview focus (p. 31).

**More use could have been made of the range of CDA approaches available.**

This is undeniable and it is also interesting to note that some current work within CDA goes into much greater depth with single approaches, for example the use of metonymy, collocation or rhetoric alone. My use of some categories could also be further developed. For example, I found the concept of 'footing' useful in exploring the participants' sense of their 'footing', such as TA 1's sense of security in understanding of emotional development and reporting more distantly on subject knowledge, TA 3's foregrounding of experience and TA 6's sense of being a critical observer reporting on events. However, this is probably not the purest sense of footing as participants' presentation of themselves as responsible or merely reporting on the experience of others. These are certainly areas I would want to develop in future.

**The discourse analysis approach is subjective.** The discourse analysis work *is* subjective on a number of levels. In short, it is my own application of a framework which I chose with participants known to me. There are three defences against this charge. The first is that there were some reasonable safeguards. The second defence is that there is transparency in methods and appropriately measured claims and, most importantly, that subjectivity is congruent with paradigm and approach.

Safeguards include:

- Components of the discourse analysis framework are all drawn from published work, much of it seminal in the field. Metaphor analysis and pronoun analysis, for example, are well-established approaches.
- The framework was discussed in supervision and with critical friends in the employing University.
- Analysis was repeatedly checked and incongruities and discrepancies noted in chapter 4.
- No material was discarded, everyone who volunteered to participate was interviewed and all interviews were analysed.

Turning to transparency and trustworthiness, full transcripts are presented as appendices and all resulting claims are tentative. Subjectivity is congruent with the genre of research and defended on these grounds. It is easy to see the apparent 'rhetorical effectiveness of tables of numbers' in more 'scientific' research over the appearance of discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, p.173). However, as Usher (2001) argues, while we have come to accept research as 'a special kind of methodologically validated knowledge', with dominant images of finding 'truth', it is easy to forget that all research is, in the end, a story (Usher 2001. p.47). The *purpose* of this research is to tell a story of aspects of the experience of some TAs. From this perspective, professional familiarity with this particular group of 8 may be a strength. There are parallels with the work of Mackenzie (2011), also working with a small group of TAs some of whom were students at her employing university. Finding ambiguities and even antagonism in relationships with teachers (p.70), Mackenzie indicates that there could be various reasons, including geographical ones but a degree of trust and openness could also have contributed to these admissions. This current study aspires to contribute in a similar way to that of Mansaray's (2006) small-scale study, again partly based in a school where he was employed, and Maliphant's autoethnographic work, where familiarity with particular situations can be of value. I have relayed the TAs' voices as well as I can. Further experience in CDA will help and perhaps further understanding of the role of CDA in educational research could help others.

## D. FINAL REFLECTIONS

The study of inclusive education is, as Allan (2008) puts it, plagued by 'vacuous platitudes' about 'celebrating' diversity and difference (Allan p. 65) and any number of technicist re-inventions of the wheel (Visser 2002, p.71). In this context, it is particularly important to avoid the easy assumption that TA support is both prerequisite and sufficient for inclusion to occur as well as the technicist view that TA practice simply needs 'tightening up' (Blatchford et al. 2012, p.122) in order to achieve better outcomes.

Technicist discussion of 'how to get the best from your TAs' tends to reflect historical and current shifts in intervention and, like the 'flood' of 'how to do it' guides (Clark et al. 1999) rarely question the *status quo*. Thus, Grue (2011) argues persuasively that people with disabilities tend to be targets of intervention rather than 'sources of socio-political change' (p.535). There is, however, support for a more radical stance. Watkinson (2003), for example, argues that looking at the employment and deployment of TAs could open 'a whole new vision of education in the twenty-first century. Why not?' (p.180). Emam and Farrell (2009), too, argue for a move away from 'short-term, pull-out, add-on' interventions (p.419) towards re-conceptualisation of support and this study aspires to contribute in this direction.

It certainly seems hard to over-state the need for continuing research in the TA field. While beyond the scope of this work to explore wider contextual changes in education and the current fiscal and political climate, despite a rising birthrate (Office for National Statistics 2012), teacher numbers are falling. Between November 2010 and November 2011 teacher numbers in England fell by 10,000 or 2% (DfE 2012a, p.1). By comparison, the numbers of FTE teaching assistants continued to increase, albeit at a slower rate than in some previous years (DfE 2012a, p.2), with 438,000 teachers and 219,800 TAs in position in November 2011. Hammersley-Fletcher and Lowe (2011) argue that TAs are potentially 'shaping the role of the teacher in new and dramatic ways' (p.79). This phenomenon is likely to have reductionist and Taylorist features in the wider educational landscape, the ongoing context of



‘modernising’ public services through role-analysis and differential allocation of tasks. However, TAs also continue to constitute a significant element of the educational experience of pupils deemed to have SEN. Here the gift of the interpretivist standpoint is the space to think about beliefs, in this case in relation to SEN and the work of TAs, since in Fish’s (1989) words ‘Beliefs are not what you think *about* but what you think *with*’ ... (p.326).

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendices are in volume 2.